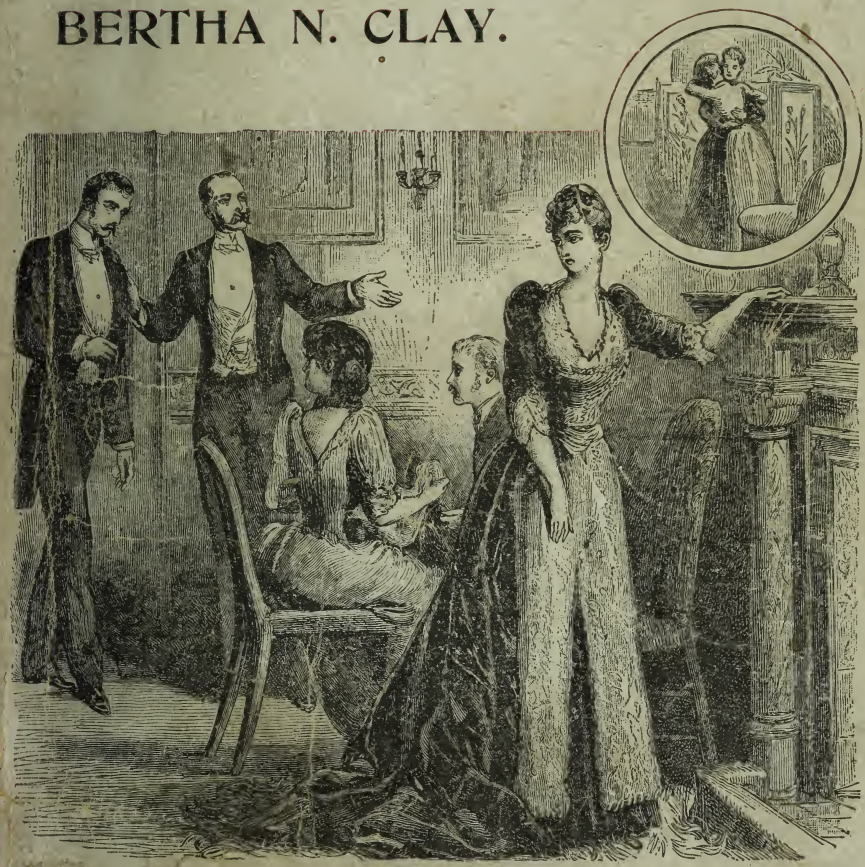
Foiled by Love

BERTHA N. CLAY.



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FOILED BY LOVE.

The distance to the river's brink is only a few yards.

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By

BERTHA N. CLAY.

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CHAPTER I.

In the front room of a house in Fig street, Chelsea, a woman and a girl are seated at work.

The former is darning a coarse stocking, much the worse for wear. The latter is making a pencil drawing of an artistic-looking jug that stands upon the table.

Both are silent. The mother is busy with thoughts which give a sad expression to a face still refined, but once beautiful. She is plainly and simply dressed, in coarse blue serge, but her gown is made with taste; it fits her still graceful figure perfectly, and there is a neatness about the plain linen collar and the well-brushed but faded hair such as one but rarely sees in a woman of her station in life.

Presently she says:

"You must get on quickly with your lessons, Hetty; there are those slippers to fill in for the Berlin wool-shop, I promised them by to-morrow morning; and these stockings must be mended. You can do which you like."

"Just another minute, mother," is the answer, "then I shall have finished this, and I will get on with the slippers. You know I never can darn stockings, I always make them in lumps."

"That is because you don't make up your mind to mend them properly," is the quiet reply. "If you resolutely determined to do any one thing well, you may be quite sure you would succeed."

"So you have often told me, mother," responds Hetty,

thoughtfully, pausing to bite her pencil, "and I have wondered that, as you believe this, and are so very clever, that you have not done something in all your life to make you rich or famous."

"If a man or a woman falls so low in the social scale as I have fallen, they never rise again," replies Mrs. Hamblin, sadly. "But don't talk or think of me; I am no example for you or for any woman. You have your way to make in the world, Hetty, and provided you are honest and pure you must succeed in attaining an honorable position."

"You have been a dear, good mother to Chris and me," cries the girl, flinging her arms round her parent's neck, and kissing her fondly.

Then, as her mother pauses to respond, pressing her tenderly round the waist, and murmuring, "My precious one!" Hetty asks, softly:

"What was my grandfather's name, mother? What were you before you married my father?"

Mrs. Hamblin starts from her daughter's embrace as though the question had wounded her in some vital part; her face becomes deadly pale, she presses her hands upon her heart, then says, in a low, pain-wrung voice:

"Never ask that question again, never seek to know the answer! When I left my father's house to marry he read the funeral service over the child he had lost, and I died to him and to my old life as completely as though I had indeed been buried."

Then, with her head bent upon her breast and her whole figure drooping, the unhappy woman walks out of the room, and the troubled girl is left alone.

For a few seconds Hetty continues to bite her pencil meditatively; then she flings it down, and, springing to her feet, exclaims, passionately:

"What a horrid old man my grandfather must have been, to read the funeral service over his daughter, whom he knew to be alive! Not much like my father; he lets me do just

as I please. Dear old dad! He would be perfect if he were always sober."

This last thought brings a train of painful recollections to her mind, and, with a view of abstracting her thoughts from the great blot upon their domestic life, Hetty finds the canvas intended for slippers, and soon she is industriously at work upon it.

There is very little money to be made at this work, and Hetty and her mother have, neither of them, much time to give to it, but the three or four shillings a week they manage to earn between them helps to supply their simple wardrobe.

As she sits there in the plainly-furnished room, with the dainty woolwork in her hands, Hetty Hamblin makes as fair a picture as will ever hang upon the walls of the Royal Academy.

She is very young, scarcely sixteen, but she is tall and well developed for her age; her waist is small and beautifully round, her complexion is clear and white, her neck is like a pillar of ivory, and her hair has that peculiar tinge of bronze, with a glint of gold in it, which is more often seen in Venetian pictures than in real life.

But it is her eyes — those long, liquid, lustrous eyes, that give the greatest charm to the face — those eyes look purple and violet and blue, as the light falls upon them; while a careless observer would think they were black, so long and heavy are the curling eyelashes that sweep the fair cheek, upon which they so often rest.

It is a singular and a beautiful face, with features of a high order; quite a contrast to all the girl's surroundings, which are coarse and sordid and mean.

But Hetty's surroundings have been pretty much the same ever since she was born, sometimes worse, never better. Therefore her innate grace and beauty must have been inherited from either or both of her parents. Plain as is the furniture of the room, there is something suggest-

ive of stables about it all — there are whips and spurs and bits hung on the walls, or reposing on shelves; while the portraits of some famous racers look down on the solid deal table, now covered with a faded red cloth; the wooden arm-chair, evidently used by the master of the household; the horse-hair couch, the cracked chimney-glass, and the threadbare pieces of carpet that are flung upon the floor.

But there are two things in this apartment, besides the fair girl that occupies it, that help to humanize and refine it — one is a carefully-tended flower, which blooms by the window; the other is a piano, not new, or even modern in shape, but which shows signs of much usage; while the pile of worn and discolored music is a clear proof that somebody here knows how to play.

Hetty is industriously stitching, and is thinking of her mother, and of the grandeur she must have left behind her when she deserted her father's roof to marry a man infinitely below her in social position, when a loud rat, tat, tat, tat, comes upon the front door, and she flings down her work and hastens to obey the summons.

Of course, no servant is kept in this house; Hetty and her mother do all the household work. There is sometimes even a struggle to keep a roof over their heads; and, as it is, the one odd room that can be spared is let to a still more humble lodger.

But no lodger in so small an establishment would come to the door with such a thundering knock, and Hetty is so startled that she has reached the passage and opened the door before her mother has got to the top of the stairs.

"Does Joe Hamblin live here!" asks a haughty and imperious voice.

"Yes, sir," is the reply.

"Is he in?" is the next question, uttered in the same tone; but evidently spoken before the questioner has had time to look at the girl who has answered him, for the gentleman's voice perceptibly changes, as he next asks;

"Pardon me; do you expect him home shortly?"

"I don't know, he is very uncertain; but I will ask my mother," says Hetty, coloring deeply under the bold eyes which are gazing in admiration upon her face.

"No need to do that; I will come in and wait," is the next assured remark.

And, despite the girl's evident reluctance to admit him, he walks into the house as though wherever he chose to bestow his presence it must be welcome.

Hetty retreats before him rather than leads the way into the living room; she is too much of a child, despite her height, too much unversed in the ways of the world, to bar his entrance, but she knows that he ought not to come here, that both her father and mother will be annoyed at his presence, and after pointing to a seat she would leave him alone, if he did not detain her by asking:

"Is Joe Hamblin your father?"

She replies in the affirmative.

"I thought there was a likeness," he remarks. "He is a trainer of horses, isn't he?"

"Yes," she returns, nervously.

"I thought as much," he goes on. "He has been recommended to me; he is not in any regular employment at present, is he?"

"I think not, but I don't quite know; here is my mother, she can tell you better than I."

And as Hetty speaks, Mrs. Hamblin, very pale, but calm and self-possessed, comes into the room.

Lord Claude Irongate is sufficiently startled by the appearance of the trainer's wife to rise and bow with much more deference than he is in the habit of showing to women in humble life; for there is something in Mrs. Hamblin's face that commands respect from the highest as well as the lowest, and while in her presence Lord Claude can but yield to her influence.

"I want to see Joe Hamblin," he says, courteously; "he will be back soon, will he not?"

"No, I don't expect him till the evening," is the reply.

"Pardon me, I must have misunderstood," he says, turning to Hetty with a sweet smile, as though he were asking her to help him out of his difficulty.

But she says, steadily:

"I told you I did not know when he would be back."

"Ah, how stupid of me!" he remarks, with a laugh at his own expense; mentally, he adds:

"What a little fool the girl is; why couldn't she help me over the stile? But I rather like a pretty simpleton; it will be refreshing after the blue stockings with whom I have lately been thrown." Then, with the adroitness of a man of the world, he says, aloud:

"You live in a very out-of-the-way place; I have had some difficulty in finding you."

"The postman has no difficulty," says Mrs. Hamblin, quietly, "and my husband rarely has any one to come here."

"No, I should think not," responds his lordship, a trifle more curtly.

He understands that Mrs. Hamblin is not to be won over to talk in a friendly or confidential tone, neither is she at all likely to leave her daughter to converse with him; so he returns to the business that brought him here, and, producing his card-case, he writes the name of a hotel upon a piece of pasteboard, and, leaving it upon the table, says:

"There is my card; please tell Hamblin to call on me to-morrow before ten."

Then, with a gracious bow to Hetty, and a much less effusive one to her mother, he returns to the front door, Mrs. Hamblin following him.

When the latter comes back to the room, she finds her daughter reading the visiting card, speculating upon its owner.

"Lord Claude Irongate," she reads aloud; "isn't it a pretty name, mother, and isn't he handsome?"

"I neither admire him nor his name," is the sharply uttered response; "and I cannot understand why you brought him into this place."

"I didn't bring him, mother, he came without being asked," protests the girl.

But her parent waves her hand as though she would say, "Enough of this," and a minute or two afterward she inquires how Hetty is getting on with her work.

For a full hour after this Hetty and her mother continue to ply their needles, the silence between them almost unbroken. Mrs. Hamblin's thoughts have wandered back to the past, Hetty's are busy with the present.

She is thinking of Lord Claude's handsome face, of his golden hair, his long drooping mustache, and of that indefinable something about him which reminds her of her mother.

Hetty is not clever at putting two and two together to arrive at any given result, and her experience of the world has been too slight for her to realize that her mother and this young lord had possibly sprung from the same class in society, rather than that there is any real similarity between them.

She is still thinking of their recent visitor, when the sound of a latch-key opening the front door is quickly followed by the entrance of her father.

As a specimen of mere physical beauty, Joe Hamblin would have borne off the prize twenty years ago in any competition; he is a handsome-looking man still, but he bears upon his puffy cheeks and bleared eyes the indelible marks of the drunkard.

He is sober this morning, probably because his pockets are empty, and, after a growl of greeting, he asks impatiently:

"Haven't you got any dinner for a man? I'm hungry!"

"I didn't expect you," replies his wife, indifferently; but there is some cold meat. Hetty, lay the cloth and fetch it from the safe."

"Cold meat!" growls Hamblin, discontentedly; "you know I hate cold meat. On such a day as this, too, with a north-east wind freezing the blood in my veins."

"You should have said you were coming home to dinner," retorts the wife, quietly.

But her husband does not heed her, his eye has caught sight of the visiting card, and he pounces upon it eagerly.

"Lord Claude Irongate!" he cries; "the very swell I've wanted to know. I'm in luck's way! His horse Nimrod won the Lancaster plate last year."

Then he makes his wife and daughter repeat all that his lordship has said to them, and he is so elated at the prospect of the forthcoming interview that he forgets to grumble any more about his cold dinner, and does not even make a complaint at having to drink water with his meal instead of ale.

But even as he eats he talks. He is as sanguine and as easily elated as a child, and he begins to speculate upon the employment which Lord Claude means to offer him, his imagination even going so far as the management of his stud of race horses and a comfortable house to live in.

"A house in the country, father," exclaims Hetty; "oh, wouldn't that be delightful? Just think of being awakened by the lark in the morning; of having dear little chickens to feed; of wandering in the woods and picking the primroses and violets and wild anemones; of hearing the lowing of cattle, the gurgling of water, and seeing the clear, blue sky overhead. Away from all the bricks and mortar, and the noise and bustle of the streets; oh, it would be like heaven to me!"

Then, turning to her other parent, she asks:

"Wouldn't you like it, mother?"

"No," is the cold but emphatic reply.

"Your mother never likes anything that other folks do," growls Hamblin, "but she must take what she can get, like the rest of us."

Then he lights his pipe, and sits over the fire smoking.

His wife and he are as far asunder as the poles in thought, tastes and sympathy.

Whatever love or passion gilded the first few months of their married life has long since disappeared, and he has painfully realized that it would have been far better for him to have married a woman in his own station than to have aspired to the hand of his master's daughter.

As for her, she has hundreds of times wished that she had died rather than have married as she did.

It is the children that have kept them together, and that have made life endurable to both; and it is with the fortunes of one of those children that we have most to do.

But this day comes to a close, as other days before it have died away, and on the following morning Joe Hamblin returns from his interview with Lord Claude Irongate with the announcement that he has accepted the post of head trainer to his lordship's stud, that he has likewise obtained a berth at the same place for his son Chris, and that before the end of the week they and all their belongings must transfer themselves to Stanmoor.

"Stanmoor!" repeats Mrs. Hamblin, with white lips and pallid cheeks; "it is impossible, I cannot—I will not go there."

And her husband replies, moodily:

"You must please yourself. I'm not going to stay in London to starve; I shall go myself, and shall take Hetty and Chris with me."

And he knows, from the groan his wife utters, that he will take her also.

CHAPTER II.

CHRIS HAMBLIN is a handsome, good-natured little fellow; lithe of limb and light of weight, and he stands a chance, with good luck, of being one of the most successful jockeys of the day.

He is very fond of his sister, and is proportionately afraid of his mother, between whom and himself there never has been any confidence, while there has been as little love.

For Chris is like his father on a smaller scale — no trace of high birth or of gentle blood is to be found in him; he is a jockey pure and simple, fond of horses, learned in all the tricks of the stable, his great ambition being to ride the winner of the Derby or of some other famous race, and to grow rich as many men of the same calling have done before him.

Chris has no ambition to be anything more than a jockey.

He knows that his mother was born a lady, but he does not desire to be like any of her family. Learning was always a trouble to him, and when he left the board-school, he did so because he was old enough to escape from authority, and not because of any proficiency in his studies.

With Hetty matters were widely different; she learned rapidly, she delighted in study, and she has already made great progress both in music and drawing.

So matters stand when the Hamblins move to Stanmoor —a big rambling house, built on the side of a hill, with extensive stables and outhouses standing a good quarter of a mile in the rear.

The great feature of Stanmoor is its stables. The house itself has a neglected appearance, as though it had fallen in its fortunes from the residence of a gentleman to that of an upper servant; and the extensive grounds, which are planted with many rare trees brought from foreign countries, look wild and uncared for.

At the bottom of the hill winds the sluggish river, looking like a ribbon of shining silver as Hetty and her mother first come in view of the house.

The girl utters a cry of delight, and the mother smiles faintly in sympathy with her daughter's pleasure ; but the smile soon disappears, for Mrs. Hamblin is uneasy and suspicious, and the very liberality with which Lord Claude Irongate has treated them has alarmed and surprised her.

But his lordship has more than one motive for this conduct: Joe Hamblin is known as a good trainer and honest in his way, and Chris is a careful though fearless rider, so father and son may help to put some thousands of pounds into his pockets ; while the presence of an exceedingly pretty girl at Stanmoor, is a by no means unwelcome attraction.

The Hamblins have not been at Stanmoor a week, however, before Lord Claude understands that Hetty is carefully kept out of his way by her mother.

At first he is irritated by Mrs. Hamblin's watchfulness, and by the quiet manner in which she keeps him at a distance, ignoring alike his condescension and his attempts at friendliness and familiarity ; her husband and son are his servants, but she and her daughter are not, and though she dare not say so, she more than once makes him feel that, despite his solicitude for their comfort, he has absolutely no business in the house.

Hetty is unconscious of all this. In the new life that has opened out to her she takes unceasing pleasure ; her mother is now able to afford a country servant to do the household work, and this leaves her free to pursue her studies, and to give much of her time to the garden, which has been sadly neglected.

It was February when they first came here, and the bitter east wind made walking in the open country disagreeable ; added to which, Hetty has an unreasonable fear of cows and of all horned cattle, and for a little while her walks are con-

fined to the neglected grounds of the house, or consist in going to the neighboring town, which is only a mile distant.

Here there is a public library where she can get books to read free of charge; and there is also the church to which she and her mother go regularly every Sunday.

It is at church principally that she sees Lord Claude Irongate and his sister — Lady Daphne, with their aunt, who lives with them, and who takes the place of a mother to her brother's children.

There are other people of distinction and position who attend this church, and whose very names are unknown to Hetty; but she looks at them wonderingly from her far-away place in the free seats, until their faces become familiar to her,

There is one gentleman's face for which she looks every Sunday. What magnet draws her eyes toward him she cannot tell, but Lord Claude knows him, so does Lady Daphne, and it may be the fact of this lady's face lighting up with sudden brightness when she first meets this gentleman that makes Hetty think there must be something unusually fascinating about him.

But the great families that live around Colneford are a constant source of interest to Hetty, and she wonders vaguely how it is that a great social gulf yawns between her and them.

That the gulf is there, and cannot be passed over, Lord Claude always makes her feel, if by any chance he can manage to speak with her out of the hearing of others; for his easy familiarity grates upon her nerves, and rouses her pride, sets her whole soul up in arms against him, and drives her to fly for refuge from his bold admiration with her father, or Chris, or, still better, with her mother.

Conscious that their daily bread depends upon the favor of this man, whose admiration is little better than an insult, Hetty makes no complaint to any one; but she avoids Lord Claude as much as possible, and hopes that

when he sees how unwelcome are his honeyed words he will cease to whisper them in her ears.

April and May have gone by; it is the month of June, and roses are climbing over the front of the house in which Hetty and her parents live, and one white bud looks in at her chamber window; the whole of the country also is beautiful with flowers and foliage, and Hetty has by this time managed to become acquainted with the most lovely spots for several miles round.

On this particular day, Hetty hastens to finish the task set her by her mother; and as soon as dinner is over, while Mrs. Hamblin, who is not very well, lies down to rest for awhile, Hetty, with a hat on her head and a pretty basket in her hand, sets off to walk to Brent Wood, which is deservedly famous in the neighborhood for the beauty and abundance of its wild flowers.

Hetty's dress is of the plainest material possible, a pale blue cambric, without either pattern or stripes upon it, made by her mother and herself, but fitting her exquisitely, showing the soft curves of her graceful, girlish figure; the round, tapered waist, the budding bust, and the strong, though small, shoe, that peeps out like a mouse from underneath the skirt.

Her hat is of the same material as her gown, simple and inexpensive to the last degree, but it suits her well; it makes her dark, heavily-fringed eyes look bluer than usual, it offers a bright contrast to the golden gleam in her bronze-hued hair, and it does what it is intended to do, it completely shields the sun from her lovely face.

To-day, Hetty is particularly light-hearted; she knows not why, but she feels so merry she could dance and sing in the very exuberance of youthful spirits, and she trips along by the riverside, too intent upon watching the fishes leap after venturesome flies to observe that Lord Claude Irongate has seen her, and is following at a distance.

Along by the side of the river, across a field, through a

small copse of fir-trees; then she opens a tall, wooden gate, and passes into the Brent Wood.

The sun is high in the heavens, and Hetty is a little tired with her walk; but here is shade and shelter from his burning rays, and, after pausing a minute or two to rest against a tree, she begins to look about her for the flowers and ferns which she came to gather.

It is always a misfortune to a girl when she has not a sister or a congenial friend to accompany her in her walks, to share her joys and her sorrows, and Hetty has never had a companion save Chris and her mother, the latter having sternly forbidden her to make friends with any of the girls with whom it has been her lot to come in contact.

Sometimes the girl is very lonely when thus thrown on her own resources; but to-day this feeling does not oppress her, and she is so busy picking the lovely flowers which grow at her feet that she forgets everything else, until a hare springs from a hole at the root of a tree close to her, and she starts back with a sudden cry of alarm.

The next moment she would laugh at her own childish terror, if a man's voice, but a few yards distant, did not ask, with unnecessary solicitude:

"What is the matter? Don't be alarmed; the hare is more frightened than you are!"

This assertion is not strictly true, for though Hetty was only startled by the hare, she is thoroughly frightened by the presence of her father's master, though she scarcely knows why she should be so.

Womanly instinct impels her to hide this fear, and with an innate dignity, inherited from her mother, she says:

"Thank you, my lord. I was more surprised than alarmed."

Then, with a humble bow, she turns away, and continues her occupation of hunting for wild flowers.

Her pale blue gown is a lovely bit of color against the green and yellow moss, the white and red and purple flowers,

and the dark foliage of the lofty trees; and Lord Claude Irongate, who is an artist in his way, and who, if he were not a wealthy man, could probably earn a living by his brush, wishes that he had his painting-box at hand, so that he might transfer the scene to canvas.

Hetty had turned from him as though she expected he would go on his way and pay no more heed to her. Nothing, however, is farther from his intention. He takes a few steps to the right so that he can get a glimpse of her lovely face, and then all thought of regarding her only as a beautiful picture vanishes from his mind.

Her face fires his heart with passion, but it likewise sets him thinking. Where did she get such glorious eyes, such an exquisitely-formed face, such glittering, gold-tipped hair, and where has he seen another face so like hers that from the very first moment of their meeting her countenance seemed familiar to his gaze?

He cannot tell. Her face seems to carry his mind back to some old picture gallery, where beauties of a by-gone century, attired in marvelous costumes, look down with unchanging smiles upon the wondering crowds that pass by them. But he cannot fix the time or place when those eyes on canvas first met his own, and, with the living girl before him, he soon ceases to wonder where he first saw her prototype.

As for Hetty, without seeming to hurry from him, she has picked a flower here and there, and has gone on some little distance in the direction of one of the lodge gates, which she knows is not far off.

If she can only reach the lodge, she feels she will be safe, and, even as she is hurrying onward, she chides herself for her nervous anxiety to get out of sight of Lord Claude.

He has never offered her an insult; he has, it is true, treated her with an amount of familiarity that has made the proud blood rush to her temples, and has excited the indignation of her mother; but she is dimly conscious that

other people — Molly Stiles, for instance — would not feel at all insulted if a gentleman in Lord Claude's position spoke to her in the same manner; and Hetty tries to impress upon her own mind that she herself stands no higher in Lord Claude's eyes than does Molly, her mother's servant.

Still, there are instincts in our natures which will not be stifled — a man born to greatness must have great thoughts in his heart and brain, be his surroundings ever so humble — and what is true of man is in a far higher degree true of woman.

It was the instinct that, however charming Lord Claude Irongate might be to her when he chose, he was practically her enemy, that made Hetty Hamblin try to reach the keeper's lodge before he can come near to her.

But her efforts are in vain — she had miscalculated the distance — if she had abandoned her flowers and taken to her heels, she would still not have reached the lodge in time; and the sound of falling water close at hand convinces her of the fact, even while it attracts her toward it.

She remembers that a branch of the sluggish river is here utilized to supply water to the castle, which stands in the park yonder, and that it falls over a weir some ten feet high, making the peculiar sound which now falls upon her ear.

The position of the weir convinces her of her inability to reach the lodge before his lordship joins her, even if he does not suddenly hurry onward, and, even as the thought flashes through her mind, she hears the footsteps come nearer, and, scarcely thinking of what she does, she quickens her own pace into a run.

But her steps are now turned toward the river, instead of in the direction of the game-keeper's lodge, and she just comes in sight of the stream as Lord Claude, with a laugh on his lips and a dangerous light in his eyes, reaches her side.

"So you thought to run away from me, did you?" he

asks, flinging his arm round her waist. "Silly girl, as though I were going to let you off like this without a kiss."

As he speaks he bends his mustached lips to kiss her; but Hetty, during the past five minutes, has grown wild with terror.

A kiss may be a very simple thing when willingly given, and gladly or coyly received; but when it is to be forced upon you, when your agonized mind conjures up a host of real or imaginary terrors, then a kiss is a very dreadful thing — something we would shrink from, even at the risk of our lives.

The clasp of Lord Claude's arm round her waist has taken from Hetty her last atom of self-possession.

With all her strength she tries to tear herself from the arm that holds her; the poor flowers which she has picked fall to the ground and are trampled upon in her struggle; but his clasp is like a band of steel around her, and, though she cannot get away, she fights and hides her face, and twists herself so that he may kiss her hat, or the back of her head, but cannot touch her face.

Lord Claude is baffled and irritated.

This girl's dislike to him is too intense to be simulated, and he has been so much accustomed to an easy victory that it fairly surprises him.

It rouses a demon in his breast.

He will not be mastered by a chit of a girl — the daughter of one of his own servants, too; no, if he does her some mortal injury, he is determined to make her obedient and submissive to his will.

But even as this resolve frames itself in his excited mind, his foot catches in the fibrous root of an old tree, and in his fall his arms involuntarily open wide, and Hetty is free.

A girl less determined than she to escape from her captor at any price would have stood still and hesitated, and looked at her fallen foe; but Hetty does nothing of the kind.

There is but one way of escape for her, and that is by the river.

But how to cross it? The stream is far too deep to be waded; she cannot swim; and, determined as she is to get away from Lord Claude, she still does not meditate suicide.

There is the weir, over which the water flows in a strong stream, churning itself into white foam before it reaches the river below, and on the opposite bank to that on which she stands is the pumping-house, where surely one man at least is at work, who would if need be give her protection.

Such is the thought that flashes through her mind as Lord Claude relaxes his hold of her and falls to the ground.

He is on his feet again in a moment, but she is quicker than he; like a flash of light she darts to the end of the weir, and he, startled by her evident intention, comes as swiftly after her.

If Hetty could pause to think, the step she now takes would be fatal, for over the top of the weir the river is flowing fast, and the pool beneath into which it falls is so deep that if she were once carried down with the foaming water she would probably never rise to the surface again.

But her heart and brain are on fire with terror — she is reckless of any other danger save that of having to submit to this man's loathsome caresses. A cry of horror escapes from Lord Claude's lips as Hetty, fearlessly and without pausing to estimate the danger, runs swiftly and lightly across the top of the weir to the opposite bank of the stream.

Terror gives speed to her feet, and so rapid are her movements that the flowing river has not time to resist her passage before she has safely crossed the perilous current.

It is all the work of a few seconds — the fight for a kiss, the struggle, Lord Claude's fall, and the crossing of the river by the terrified girl.

But one man at any rate had witnessed the scene, and he

rushes out of the house in which the pumping-machine is kept, to meet the girl who has so recklessly hazarded her life.

Hetty, recognizing the face of the gentleman upon whom Lady Daphne Irongate smiles so sweetly, cries with imploring gesture:

"Save me! Save me!" and falls senseless upon his breast.

CHAPTER III.

Lord Claude Irongate follows Hetty swiftly to the bank of the river.

As he stretches out his hand he can almost touch her, but she speeds like the wind, and his terror is that she means to fling herself into the deep river to escape his unwelcome caress.

But when she reaches the top of the weir and passes over, as already described, he holds his breath with fear and amazement, not daring to follow her, and when she falls into the arms of Gilbert Tavenner, an imprecation, not loud, but deep, issues from his lips, and he mutters, fiercely:

"That little fool will make a scandal all over the country for the sake of a kiss. I wish to heaven I had never seen her!"

The hoarse murmur of the water, falling over the weir, drowns the sound of her voice, and he has to raise it to a shout when he says:

"Lay her on the grass, Tavenner, and throw some water on her face; there's nothing the matter with her, and she'll come round in a minute or two."

The gentleman thus addressed makes no answer, but he removes the large blue hat from the head of the insensible girl and looks at her with mingled astonishment and admiration; for, accustomed as he is to the society of beautiful women, his eyes have never rested upon a sweeter or a lovelier countenance.

He has to hold her tightly, or she would fall; and in a second or two he finds it best to follow Lord Claude's suggestion, and allow her to sink gently upon the grass.

Her face is very pale, her limbs are heavy and motionless, but she looks, in her delicate blue gown, like some enchanted princess, who had fallen into a trance; and the gurgling rush of the falling water, the leaf-laden trees, the quaint red brick of the pumping-house, the undulating well-wooded park, and the soft summer air, are all so many natural accessories to the scene.

Lord Claude, on the opposite side of the weir, frets and fumes, but cannot pass over.

He knows the danger of such an attempt far better than Hetty.

She, in her terror, and her lightness and sureness of foot, has cleared the space in safety; but for him to attempt it would be madness and certain destruction, for while he was trying to make sure of his foothold the impatient river would sweep him away, and once in the pool below his chances of escape would be almost nil.

So here he stands, looking at Hetty, longing to take steps for her recovery, longing, also, to kiss her fair face and to express his penitence, even while he takes all and more than he has yet dared to ask.

But the river rolls between them, that river like a bar of Fate, and the admiration which he felt for the girl, and which has only an hour ago ripened into passionate love, is now fed by jealousy, and grows into immense stature, like the genie of old when he emerged in vapor from the tiny casket, till he assumed the proportions of a giant.

Minutes, rather than seconds, seem to elapse before Tavenner again emerges from the pumping-house, without having found anything for his purpose.

There are no workmen here, a circumstance for which Lord Claude is intensely thankful, for workmen would carry the story abroad, and it is just possible that he may be able

to induce both Hetty and Tavenner to preserve a discreet silence.

Though the latter has not found a glass or a bowl, he is not without resources, and he takes his low-crowned hat to the river's brink, stoops, and half fills it, then brings it back and sprinkles the cold fluid upon Hetty's white face.

The effect is soon perceptible. The girl gasps, sobs, then opens her star-like eyes, and Gilbert Tavenner gazes at her like one spell-bound.

Where did she get such eyes—clear and beautiful, and liquid in their deep, pure, blue — eyes shaded with such long, black silken lashes that their very color is a surprise to him?

Tavenner looks at the reviving girl long and earnestly, then he glances across the river at Lord Claude Irongate, whom he knows full well; and he turns his gaze back upon Hetty, with a pitiful glance, as a Roman might have looked upon Virginia when Appius Claudius claimed her as his slave.

For Lord Claude Irongate had shouted out impatiently: "Don't be afraid, man; dash the water in her face! She is only my trainer's daughter."

The knowledge of the fair girl's humble position only calls forth a greater amount of chivalrous feeling on the part of Gilbert Tavenner, and he says gently:

"Don't be alarmed, my good girl, there is nothing to frighten you. I will see you safely home—there, you are better now; I suppose it was the heat of the day that made you faint."

"You are very good to me," she replies, clasping her hands and looking up to him with such genuine gratitude and admiration that he feels himself blush.

"I have done nothing," he returns, evasively, "except throw some water on your dress, which I am afraid will not improve its appearance."

"You have saved me from Lord Claude," she says, tremulously; "he—he wanted to kiss me."

She says this in such an abashed and troubled tone, and droops her head with so much genuine confusion, that he restrains his inclination to laugh, and looking at her troubled face, and fired with admiration by her beauty, he exclaims earnestly:

"He had no right to alarm you, and you must have been greatly frightened to dare to cross the weir as you did. But you feel better now, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, thank you! I am quite well," she replies, rising to her feet.

Then, as she sees Lord Claude on the opposite bank of the stream, she involuntarily shrinks to the side of her new acquaintance as she says appealingly:

"You won't let him touch me, will you?"

"Certainly not," is the answer. "I will see you safely to your own door, if you will allow me."

"There is no need for that, thank you," she replies, nervously, "only keep him away from me, and I shall be quite safe. It will be better, too, for you not to be seen with me, for my mother would ask how you came to know me, and then I should have to tell her."

"But she could not be angry with you!" expostulates the young man, with unnecessary solicitude.

"No, perhaps not," she replies, nervously; "but my father is in Lord Claude's service, and it will be a sad thing for us if he sends us away because of this."

"He had no business to follow you and frighten you!" exclaims Tavenner, hotly.

"No, if he had been a gentleman at heart, he would not have done it, would he?" she asks, thoughtfully.

"No!" he replies, slowly. But at the same time, he wonders what man, save himself, would resist the witchery of those deep blue eyes, and the inviting tenderness of those

soft, dewy lips, which seem to be lifted on purpose to tempt him to kiss them.

Needless to say, nothing could be farther from Hetty's mind than such a thought. She feels intuitively that her present companion is a man of honor, that she is safe in his company, and she is more conscious than she has ever previously been that he has a singularly attractive and winning face.

He is very tall, fully six feet in height. His head is covered with thick, waving, dark-brown hair, worn rather long, and forming a frame for his handsome countenance, which is something Byronic in type.

Its charm is felt by Hetty, though she cannot define her own feelings.

There is something in the fine eyes, in the handsome nose and kindly mouth, the latter half hidden by a youthful mustache, that gives her confidence in their owner; and though she does not forget that he is a gentleman, and that she is the daughter of a man of lowly condition, his manner is so tender and respectful that it would be impossible for her to be reserved or shy.

He has picked up her hat and given it to her, and has looked a great deal of the admiration and sympathy he does not venture to express; and then they turn to leave the weir, which makes so much noise as to partially drown their voices.

Lord Claude Irongate has shouted across once or twice, but Hetty has not answered him, has not even looked his way, and Gilbert Tavenner has curtly responded:

"I can't talk to you here."

Then he leads Hetty into the park, and Lord Claude knows that he is showing her the nearest way back to Stanmoor.

If he could only cross the river and join them he would do so, but this is impossible, unless he takes the same peril-

ous way as that pursued by Hetty, and the nearest foot-bridge is a good mile distant.

His mortification is intense, for Hetty has escaped him. Tavenner has witnessed his defeat, and he is, above all things, anxious to speak to both of them before they can breathe to any other person a word of what has happened.

He believes he can easily frighten Hetty into silence, because the situations held by her father and her brother are at stake; but then he must be able to speak to her first and to establish some kind of an understanding with her.

But Tavenner is different.

If Tavenner goes and repeats this story, tells it to a few men who frequent the clubs to which they both belong, and who will not fail to embellish it with sundry additions, it will be a standing joke against him for some months and may also lead to other unpleasant consequences.

For there are one or two secrets in Lord Claude's life which he would not like to be made known to the world, and when this is the case a man is always anxious to escape notoriety.

Experience has shown him that the most carefully-guarded skeleton will sometimes walk out of its closet, because the owner thereof has been careless with the key; and, in this case, an amusing story in which he had been baffled by a pretty girl might be as sure a key to unlock the prison house in which his secrets are kept as was the clue of silk to enter the bower of Fair Rosamond.

So, while he curses his own folly and anathematizes the perversity of girls in general, and of Hetty in particular, he begins to walk at a rapid pace with a view of intercepting the couple before they can reach Stanmoor.

If it were not for the river he could easily overtake them, for he can see them strolling at a very leisurely pace through the park, but presently the trees hide them from his sight; then he has himself to go through a portion of a wood, and

when he reaches the foot-bridge by which he can cross the river, the couple are evidently far ahead of him.

The sun is shining fiercely overhead. Walking rapidly over rough ground is fatiguing ; it is now almost impossible to overtake the couple, who are far in advance of him, and even if he were to do so what can he say to either of them when they are together ?

He would not like Tavenner to hear him caution Hetty to be silent, and he would not like the girl to be present when he asked the former not to say anything about the little scene in which he had taken a part.

A moment's reflection convinces him that Hetty will probably be reticent for her own sake, and that, in any case, Gilbert Tavenner is the one whose silence it is most to his interest to insure.

So he walks along leisurely, keeping a sharp look-out in every direction, and presently he perceives the man whom he seeks coming slowly and thoughtfully toward him.

"So the little prude would not let him go all the way home with her !" he mutters, savagely. "She is a bewitching little jade. If it were not for her people and some half-a-dozen obstacles in the way, she might almost tempt me to marry her."

At this idea he laughs mockingly, and an on-looker, who could overhear him, might be inclined to thing that Lord Claude Irongate had already committed a similar act of folly.

He advances slowly, until he and Tavenner come face to face, and, even as their eyes meet, Lord Claude is conscious that his friend looks coldly upon him.

But it suits him to ignore this, and he laughs awkwardly as he says :

"I am glad there was nobody by but you, old man, when that girl made such a little fool of herself. I was awfully afraid, at one moment, that she was going to throw herself into the river."

"If she had done so, it is you who would have been responsible for her death," returns Tavenner, severely.

"Nonsense, man! How could I help it!" exclaims Lord Claude, indignantly. "I only tried to kiss her. We shall come to a pretty pass if a man is to be accused of murder because he tries to steal a kiss!"

Gilbert Tavenner shrugs his shoulders, but makes no other response.

His sympathies are evidently with Hetty, not with her titled tormentor, and Lord Claude feels that this is so and is annoyed in consequence. But he cannot resent this. He has a favor to ask, and he says abruptly:

"Well, happily, there is no harm done, but you will oblige me if you don't mention the matter to anybody. No doubt, it was foolish on my part, but my aunt and sister will give me no peace till I dismiss her father and brother from my service if they think I admire the girl — and that would be a pity, for they are decent fellows in their way."

"Oh, I shall not mention the matter to anybody," replies Tavenner, coldly.

"Then that is all right," is the careless response, "and I must go home. You are coming over this evening, aren't you?"

"I don't know," is the answer.

"Daphne expects you," says Lord Claude, in a tone which would convey to a stranger the impression that Lady Daphne Irongate had a right to expect him.

"Yes, perhaps I shall come," is the reply.

Then the two men nod to each other and part, neither of them sorry to be alone.

"If Tavenner were not such a straight-laced puppy," muses Lord Claude, "and not engaged to Daphne, I should say he had fallen in love with Hetty. She's lovely enough to tempt an anchorite to forget his vows; and that reminds me that I shall have to go to town in a day or two. What

a nuisance women are, and what an idiot I have been! I deserve to be whipped for my folly!"

He bites the ends of his long, drooping mustache as he thus mutters, and his handsome face wears a decided scowl; and an unlucky dog that comes out to greet him retires precipitately with a howl, while Lady Daphne and her aunt, who happen to see him approaching the house, remark, calmly:

"Claude is in a bad temper; something has occurred to put him out."

Fortunately, for their own comfort, Lord Claude, on entering Colnehurst, as the mansion is called, proceeds to the little room which he calls his study, and there he finds something which fully occupies his attention.

There is a large packet upon the table, sent on from his club in London, and, upon opening it, several letters fall out.

He takes them all up carelessly until he comes to one thicker than the rest, and this he opens with feverish irritation, as though he were anticipating evil.

This envelope contains another letter inside it, and its contents are such as to drive the warm blood from his cheek and to make him look pale and haggard.

Only for a little while, however, does he yield to the emotion it causes him. Presently he rouses himself, gathers up his papers carefully, and goes to his own dressing-room.

Half an hour afterward he is on his way to town. Business of importance calls him there, and as he passes within sight of Stanmoor on his way to the station, an unpleasant smile comes over his face, as he mutters to himself: "Perhaps when I return I shall be free!"

CHAPTER IV.

WE must go back to a date three months prior to the morning upon which Lord Claude Irongate called at Fig street, Chelsea, to engage Joe Hamblin as his trainer.

It is a day late in October. In the country the woods are aglow with the rich tints that the leaves put on before they fall to the ground and are blown hither and thither by the ruthless wind.

But you would scarcely know whether it was spring or autumn if you stood in Great Russell street, Bloomsbury, for the grass in front of the British Museum is as green and fresh as though it were April.

The sun is shining this morning, and in one of the sculpture galleries in the museum a considerable number of girls and young men are at their easels drawing.

Silence reigns in the place, save where some novice lifts his or her voice above the low tone in which conversation is ordinarily carried on.

There are girls here who are beautiful, others who are decidedly plain; there are men who come to study and to work hard, others who idle away their time, and in whom the artistic faculty will never be developed.

That girl yonder, who is drawing the statue of Apollo, seems to have in her soul the fire of genius.

Her work attracts the attention of all who pass by her, but she is too much accustomed to observation to be in the least disturbed by it.

She is singular enough herself to make people turn and look twice at her face. Her hair is dark, wavy and abundant, and she despises the fashion of combing it up into a coil at the top of her head, but after pinning it back from her face she allows it to fall below her waist at its own sweet will.

This shortens her apparent height, which is under five feet but it suits the expression of her face, which is

slightly peevish in its type, and is Mexican rather than English in its character.

Her complexion is dark and rich in its coloring, the bright red of her cheeks and lips contrasting with the clear olive tint of her brow and neck. Her eyes are large, flashing, yet some times dreamy, and her figure is partly hidden by her loose sleeves, hanging hair, and full Italian-shaped bodice.

Very industriously she works, until a footstep close behind her makes her heart bound with sudden emotion, while a rich color dyes her cheeks, and her hands from sheer excitement become damp and clammy.

In another minute a man is by her side, man with a proud, handsome face, with blue eyes and golden hair, and a long, drooping mustache, just the kind of a man to take a young girl's fancy, and Eugenie de Mæstro had lost her heart to the fair Englishman at their first meeting.

An easy conquest is always lightly held, and Eugenie, who has been cold as ice to all previous admirers, finds herself trembling with emotion, like an aspen leaf shaken by the warm breath of summer, when this man, who is the lord of her destiny, is by, and looks at her with his cold blue eyes, which seem to read the hidden thoughts in her soul.

No need to ask if she loves him, the story is told in her eyes whenever they meet, but their meetings are not frequent, for Laurence Trevor, though he draws far better than she, and will sometimes help her a little with her work, as a pretext for conversation, does not really come to the museum to draw from the antique, and therefore his visits are fitful and uncertain.

Sometimes he will come regularly two or three days in succession, and then a week, and even a fortnight will elapse, and during these absences Eugenie will hope and wait, until her heart grows sick and weary, and her work,

upon which she ought to concentrate her whole energies, is either neglected or badly done.

It is after one of these long absences that Mr. Trevor again makes his appearance by her side, and the look of passionate love with which she greets him throws him off his guard, overcomes a good many scruples, and he says, with tender solicitude :

"What is the matter with you, little woman ? You look pale and overworked ; you want a change — pack up your things and come for a stroll with me."

Eugenie's face becomes swiftly red, then as deadly pale. She knows that she ought not to do this ; that her brother would be furious with her if the knowledge of her having gone for a walk with a stranger came to his ears — for a walk with a man to whom she has never been properly introduced.

But the temptation is too great to be resisted. Mrs. Grundy may frown, her brother may storm and threaten, but it is impossible to talk with any degree of freedom in a place where you may not raise your voice to its natural key, and where a dozen pairs of curious eyes are again and again being turned toward yourself and your companion.

So, after a momentary hesitation, she blushingly rises and follows his suggestion of packing up her things ; then she says in an undertone :

"I will meet you under the portico," and with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, she hastens to the ladies' room, where she has left her hat and walking apparel.

It seems strange to her to be walking along the streets side by side with this man, of whom she has dreamed so much, and of whom she knows so little ; and there is that delightful spice of impropriety, without anything actually wrong, in the proceeding, that has also its charm for one who has never previously dared to infringe the rules of life laid down for her by others.

Having left the museum behind them, the couple turn into Gower street, then Laurence Trevor asks gaily :

"Where shall we go ? The river is too cold, or we could run up to Richmond ; but what do you say to the Crystal Palace ? "

"I dare not go far," she replies, timidly ; "I must be home before five o'clock, or my brother will question me."

"You are afraid of your brother?" he asks, quickly.

"I should be afraid to displease him," she answers. "He stands in the place of father and mother to me; he is ten years older than I."

"Well, shall we go and have some luncheon togther?" he asks, persuasively.

But she responds quickly:

"No, I could not do that; we will go to Regent's Park, it is not far distant, and there we can walk about and look at the swans."

"Very well," he replies, hailing a passing hansom, and before Eugenie can protest that she would rather walk she finds herself helped into the cab, and in a few minutes she is rattling along the streets, by the side of the man whose influence over her is so great as to sometimes frighten her.

"If my brother were to see me, I should die!" she says nervously, and with a little shiver ; "his rage is terrible when he is excited, and he does not quite approve of my going to the museum to study."

"What is your brother?" asks Trevor, carelessly.

"He is a merchant," she replies.

Then, feeling that she may be misunderstood, she adds :

"We are of noble birth, and my father owned large estates in Mexico, but my father and brother took part in an insurrection against the existing government. My father was shot, my mother died with grief, Leon, my brother, escaped and brought me with him to England, and he is now a partner with my uncle, my mother's brother, who is a Frenchman. But Leon is not content he always

dreams of going back to our own country and regaining our lost position; that is one reason why he would never consent to my marrying an Englishman."

"That does not look very promising for me, does it?" asks Trevor, tempted to talk on a subject upon which he is usually very cautious.

She makes no answer, except to droop her eyelids and blush prettily.

But her silence and her presence here would seem to imply that, however severe and arbitrary her brother may be, love will give her courage enough to thwart him.

They have left the cab by this time, and are wandering slowly near the ornamental waters.

Trevor had offered her his arm, and she clings to it as she lifts her bright, richly-tinted face to meet his gaze, as she responds to his questions.

In her way she is certainly beautiful; her big black eyes have a liquid luster, made more intoxicating by the love that shines through them; her teeth are white and perfect, and her red lips have an inviting charm about them which he does not try to resist, for, on the first opportunity when he thinks they are not observed, he bends down and kisses them.

"You ought not to do that," she says, blushing deeply.

But she does not withdraw her hand from his arm, and he presses it closer to his side as he asks:

"Why not?"

She makes no answer, and she does not protest when, later on, he kisses her again.

Her love has become such a part of her being that she naturally thinks it is the same with him, and, with the innocence and directness of a child, she begins to talk as though marriage must be the natural consequence of those imprudent kisses.

"I don't know what we shall do about Leon," she remarks, thoughtfully; "he once told me he would never

consent to my marrying an Englishman, but perhaps, when he finds I am determined, he may yield. But he will want to know all about your family, and what your means are; and, of course, you are not rich?"

"Artists rarely are rich," he replies, evasively and with an awkward laugh; "but I could give you a pretty cottage and, perhaps, a pony carriage, if that would satisfy your ambition."

"Oh, yes!" she exclaims, delightedly; "I should desire nothing more. I don't wish to be rich, and I am quite willing to forget that I am noble, and we will work together at our art, and one day, perhaps, we shall both be famous."

"What a child you are," he says, slightingly, "to suppose that the ladder of fame will ever be climbed by you or by me."

"I don't see why it should not," she retorts. "Others, with less talent than you or I, have succeeded."

"Well, we will hope for success, if you desire it," he replies, with an indulgent smile, that has something of a slight in it. "But what about your brother? Don't you agree with me that it will be best to ignore that gentleman altogether?"

"Ignore him?" repeats Eugenie, not understanding the drift of his remark.

"Yes," he replies; "you say he will object to me on the score of my nationality, my birth, and my position; now, if we were to meet we should be so sure to quarrel, because I am as proud on every one of these points as he is. This being the case, I suggest that we act as though such an individual as your worthy brother did not exist. By the way, how old are you?"

"I was nineteen last birthday," she replies, nervously.

The course proposed to her is full of terror, but she is too infatuated with the man who suggests it to be able to resist his influence, and she makes no protest when he says:

"You are quite old enough to be able to judge for yourself, and there can be no doubt that sooner or later you will have to choose between your brother and me."

"Leon has been very kind to me," she protests, feebly; "since our parents died he has fulfilled the vow he made to our mother, that he would guard me as the apple of his eye."

"And I love you!" he says, looking with lingering glance into her eyes; becoming more warm and passionate as she seems likely to escape him.

"Yes," she murmurs, "but Leon might be won over, and then it would be so much happier for all of us."

"I don't think it probable," he replies, coldly; "and I don't feel inclined to ask him. If you were less charming, dearest, I should think it folly on my own part to marry any but an Englishwoman."

She understands his meaning, he despises her race and her country; but it is not the first time that she has met with this feeling since she has been in England, and therefore she resents it less than she otherwise might do, and says meekly:

"It shall be as you wish, and perhaps Leon may be won over in time."

He takes no notice of this, but he says tenderly:

"I suppose you would like to be married by your own church, dear; you are a Roman Catholic, are you not?"

"No, your church shall be my church," she replies, "and your people my people."

Her eyes are fixed upon the white swans gliding so gracefully upon the water as she says this, and consequently she does not observe the expression of vexation that comes over her companion's face, neither does she turn to look at him as he says:

"I should not like to influence you in such a matter, my dear; it will be all the same to me wherever we are married."

"You will not influence me against my conscience," she replies. "I prefer the Church of England, I have been to it often ; I think I shall one day become an Englishwoman," she adds, turning to him with one of her brightest smiles.

But the smile is not returned. An ugly word issues from his lips, a frown contracts his brow, he rises hastily and turns half round, and she hears him mutter :

"Confound that fellow ! What brings him here to spy upon me ?"

The words naturally make her look in the direction from whence her companion turned away, and she perceives a gentleman walking along the path by the edge of the water.

He is young and tall, darker than Trevor, and many people would think more handsome ; he seems to be walking through this portion of the park as though that were the road he had to take in going from one place to reach another, and he does not seem to be taking any notice of the lovers seated on a couple of chairs underneath the trees.

A few minutes later and he has crossed the bridge and is out of sight, and Trevor says :

"It is rather cold here ; you don't intend to return to the museum to-day, do you ?"

"Yes ; I think I had better," she replies. "My brother sometimes calls for me on his way back from the city."

"Then I will take you to the gates," he says, absently ; "and I will come in and see you to-morrow morning.

She acquiesces silently.

In her heart it seems as though some dark shadow had fallen upon her happiness, and, child as she is in experience and in worldly wisdom, she feels that it is the height of imprudence on her part to leave the protection of her brother's home to share the lot of this man, about whom she knows absolutely nothing.

But she is infatuated ! She is in love ! And love courses through her veins like the lava streams that burst from the hearts of her native mountains.

CHAPTER V.

THE following morning Eugenie de Mæstro comes to the sculpture gallery in the British Museum as usual.

She arranges her easel and begins to draw, but her heart is not in her work.

Those students who know her observe that she is paler than usual, but they do not see that she is laboring under the influence of intense excitement, which needs all her self-command to repress.

She does not repress it, but her hand is unsteady this morning; she is so nervous that she starts at every footstep, and she looks up again and again, showing very plainly that she is expecting somebody who is tardy in coming.

Slowly the minute-hand moves round the face of the clock; slowly that never-to-be-forgotten morning passes away, and still Laurence Trevor does not come.

So fearful is she of missing him that, although she has brought a case of sandwiches with her for luncheon, she will not go to the waiting-room to eat them, and here she remains fasting, while her head aches and her heart sinks with the dread that her lover has repented of what he said to her yesterday, and that she will never see him again.

"He said he would come to-day," are the words she keeps on repeating to herself. "He spoke as though to-day he would make all arrangements for our marriage, and now he does not come, does not send, and I don't know where to find him."

The imprudence of marrying a man about whom she knows nothing does not strike this unsophisticated, emotional girl; she only knows that she loves him — she believes that he loves her — and, in her present frame of mind, provided she has him with her, that is all for which she cares.

But he does not come; and as the clock strikes four her brother, Leon de Mæstro, makes his appearance, remarking that he is here to take her home.

She packs up her things meekly. Even if she were alone she feels it would be useless to wait longer, for Laurence has always made his visits in the morning, and she told him that her brother frequently fetched her in the afternoon.

Her head seems light, while there is a painful oppression over her brows, and her heart ached as it never ached before. But she utters no word of complaint; mechanically she goes through the usual routine of dressing and walking by the side of her brother; and she answers him when he speaks to her, though her words and manner are listless and apathetic.

The next morning Eugenie's usual place before the celebrated statue is vacant, and Laurence Trevor, who comes in about twelve o'clock, walks about for awhile, thinking she will soon appear.

After waiting more than an hour, and becoming impatient meanwhile, he asks a lady artist, to whom he has occasionally seen Eugenie speak, if she thinks the latter is coming to-day.

"I don't know," is the reply; "she was looking very unwell yesterday, and her brother came for her in the afternoon; she is never so late as this when she comes to work."

"Thank you," he returns. Then, after waiting a little longer, he departs, feeling that further waste of time is useless.

The following morning he comes again with no better results, but Eugenie's absence enhances her value in his eyes.

He could have given her up easily and without a heartache, as he once meditated doing, but to be given up himself is quite another matter, and the suspicion that her brother is keeping her out of his way only makes him more eager to see her again.

The idea of trying to ascertain her address, and seeking her in her brother's house occurs to his mind, but is speedily dismissed. He must meet her here on neutral ground, so that he may tell her just what he likes about himself, and

persuade her to marry him clandestinely, and without leaving to her brother a trace of their whereabouts.

Every morning for a whole week he looks in at the museum about twelve o'clock, and, day after day, the girl whom he seeks is absent.

His craving for her presence has grown, meanwhile, but he is beginning to think that the probabilities are that they will never meet again, unless he dares all possible consequences and goes to her brother's house and asks to see her; when one morning he is walking through the sculpture galleries as usual he sees a face that attracts him, though, for a moment, he does not recognize it.

It is Eugenie, with her hair brushed up and twisted in thick coils on the top of her head.

The effect is more than satisfactory. The different style of wearing the hair gives dignity to the countenance, shows the graceful curves of the neck, and appears to afford additional height to the whole figure.

But it seems to take away from the extreme youthfulness of the girl, and she looks every day of nineteen — the age which she told Laurence Trevor she had attained.

He is so pleased to see her, however, that he does not pause to ask himself whether or not he likes the change; but he comes to her side, and, holding out his hand for hers, says:

"So we meet at last! If I had not found you here to-day, I should have left England to-morrow!"

The statement startles her, and she gives him her hand in silence.

"Where have you been?" he asks. And his tone implies that she belongs to him, and he has a right to question her.

"I have been ill," she replies, while her eyes droop, and her cheeks burn under his ardent gaze.

"Poor, little darling," he whispers, tenderly, "and I have been here day after day seeking you, until I felt that if I did not find you to-day I could bear existence no longer."

"You did not come the morning you promised," she replies, with reproach in her eyes.

"And you did?" he asks.

"Yes."

"Dearest! It was impossible for me to come that morning," he whispers, earnestly; "I was detained by important business until it was too late, and I would have sent you a note or a telegram, but it would not have been given to you here, and I could not send it to your home, because I did not know the address."

"Yes, it would never have done to send a telegram to me at home," she replies, gravely.

"Why, has anything unusual happened?" he asks quickly.

"I don't know," she answers, evasively.

"Nonsense, you must know," he asserts, with some irritation.

"I think that some change in our affairs is about to take place," she says, slowly; "it is more than probable that my visits here will not be frequent, or many."

"I must know what you mean!" he exclaims, impatiently. "Put on your hat and come out for a stroll with me."

"Come" repeated Trevor, "let us go for a stroll."

"No, I must not do that again," Eugenie says, firmly. "I believe that my brother half suspects I was out with somebody the day you and I went to the park together. His manner to me that evening was peculiar and watchful. The next day he came for me at four o'clock instead of five, then he desired me to stay away from here, and it was only because I was quite indifferent about it that he allowed me to come to-day."

"What tyranny!" exclaims Trevor, warmly. "But let him say what he likes, I must talk to you. Let us go and look at the Assyrian tablets; we can talk there."

If Eugenie was not so hopelessly in love she would demur even at this, so great is her fear of her brother. But Trevor is not to be denied, and the sound of his voice, the touch

of his hand, his living, breathing presence, overcome all the resolutions she has made, and she rises and walks with him to one of the Assyrian galleries.

Presently they are leaning over a glass case, looking at some clay tablets, the attendant being at some distance, and Trevor says, with an assumption of proprietorship he has but little right to assume:

"Now, dearest, tell me what troubles you; then I shall know how to act."

"I am afraid I shall be taken back to Mexico very shortly," she replied.

"Ah! How is that?" he demands.

"There is a plot on foot to overthrow the present government," is the answer. "My brother sympathizes with it. He brought one of the chiefs to our house the other night, and it is almost settled that Leon shall return with him, and that I shall go too."

"But why should you go?" asks Trevor, calmly.

Mentally, he thinks this a capital way of getting rid of Mr. Leon.

"If he joins them, it is part of the compact that he shall give my hand to his friend," says Eugenie, slowly.

"Ah, now I understand," cries Trevor, in a low, eager tone, "this brings matters to a crisis. You will have to chose between him and me; is your choice already made?"

One long look into his eyes, then she answers faintly, while her bosom palpitates with emotion:

"It is."

"And it is in my favor?" he asks, taking her hand and holding it in his own.

"Yes," she replies.

"Very well, we will lose no time," he responds promptly.

Then, with sudden gravity, he adds:

"You must not think me hard, dearest, if I refuse to have anything to do with your brother and his fellow-con-

spirators. In England we call plots against an existing government *treason.*"

"Yes; Leon has disappointed me," she replies, sadly. "He thinks more of his own ambition than of my happiness; by his conduct he has justified me in acting for myself."

"Very well; since that is settled, the rest will be easy," whispers Trevor. "I suppose you have no preference as to the church in which we shall be married?"

"Yes," she says, while she blushes prettily, "I should like to be married at that church outside Regent's Park; I thought so when we passed it the other day."

"What a funny idea!" he exclaims, then he asks, suspiciously:

"Do you know any one there?"

"No, I was never inside it in my life," she returns; and he answers, quietly:

"Very well, it shall be as you wish. Will Thursday suit you?"

"It is very soon," she murmurs, nervously.

"But not too soon," he urges; "remember, your brother may be more prompt than we, and may want to take you away from England at a few hours' notice."

"Yes, that is what I fear," she replies.

So Thursday is decided upon; and then they begin to retrace their steps to the spot where Eugenie's easel is awaiting her return.

But the moment she comes in sight of it, she steps back in alarm, murmuring in a low, frightened tone:

"There is Leon, my brother, waiting for me."

"I don't want to meet him," says Trevor, hastily stepping behind some colossal figure.

"I will look in here to-morrow and the next day; but if you are not here I shall expect you at the church on Thursday, at one o'clock; you won't fail me, will you?"

"No, I will not!" she replies.

"You swear it?"

"I do!"

Then for one intoxicating minute their lips meet, before Eugenie tears herself away to return to the spot where her brother is impatiently awaiting her.

"Where have you been?" asks that gentleman, imperiously, as she approaches him.

"I have been looking at some of the marbles," she replies, indifferently.

"Alone?" he demands, incredulously.

"No, an artist was with me," is the truthful reply; "but he has gone about his own business now. People here do help each other," she adds, in the hope of averting a lecture, and she glances at a young couple at a short distance from where they stand, where the gentleman is assisting the lady with her drawing.

"You will not need such help any longer," retorts Leon de Mæstro, frowning darkly, and giving his teeth an ominous snap. "I was wrong from the first to let you come here. This is your last visit, and you may pack up your things, and we will carry them away with us."

"I should like to finish this drawing," she says, nervously. "You might let me come for the rest of this week; I ask no more."

"You cannot do that," he returns, brusquely; "we leave England on Saturday."

"Well, I shall come once more," she says, with sudden decision. "I am not a child, nor a bale of merchandise, and I will not take home my drawings to-day."

"She gives her head a defiant toss as she thus speaks, and Leon, who has had some previous specimens of her obstinacy, shrugs his shoulders and abandons the disputed point, though he says, peremptorily:

"Put on your hat, and come with me at once."

And she obeys; but she does not take her drawings with her. She feels that if she leaves them behind they will be

an excuse for coming here on Thursday, and once away from her brother's house she will be able to keep her appointment at the church with Laurence Trevor.

But her brother's suspicions are aroused. She is conscious that she is watched day and night, and meanwhile preparations for her marriage with Carlo di Castro, a man whom she abhors, are being pushed forward rapidly.

This marriage is to take place on Saturday morning. Then they are to go on board a vessel in which their berths are already taken; and it is hoped that, during the voyage, when she knows him better, the young lady will get over her aversion to the man whom she is to be compelled to marry.

During the next two days Eugenie is very quiet. She seems subdued rather than frightened, and her brother is half convinced that she is making a virtue of necessity, and will offer no serious opposition to his will.

So much to himself, however, depends upon the successful carrying out of his arrangements, that he does not allow his sister to leave the house alone; and, therefore, when she announces her intention on Thursday morning of going to the British Museum to draw, he violently and positively forbids it.

"I am not a child, and I will not be treated as a child!" Eugenie exclaims, resolutely. "You have no legal right to control my actions! I am your sister, not your daughter, and if you carry your tyranny too far I will appeal to the police for protection!"

So unlike herself, so unexpected is this declaration of independence, that Leo de Mæstro is amazed, and he indignantly cries:

"This to me?"

"This to you!" retorts his sister, meeting his fiery glance with equally flashing eyes.

"I will not be controlled!" she continues, passionately.

"I have friends to whom I would say adieu ; and I will go to the museum to-day, stop me if you dare ! "

"No, I will not prevent you ; I will go with you," he says, with an unpleasant sneer. "I will witness your adieu with your fair-haired artist."

Eugenie gives an involuntary start, for until now she did not know that Leon had seen or heard of Laurence Trevor ; and he is evidently alluding to him as the "fair-haired artist."

But she quickly retorts:

"Please yourself about that ; I am going, and I am going to draw for a little while. It may be the last time that I shall sit in those lofty galleries that I love so much."

"It *will* be for the last time," he says, emphatically ; "so you may make the most of it. And do not tax my patience too heavily ; we must be home again at two o'clock ; I have men coming to see me."

"Very well," replies Eugenie, with seeming indifference.

To herself she says :

"Two o'clock ! What will have happened between this and two o'clock ? "

It is twelve o'clock before the brother and sister reach the British Museum. It is fifteen minutes past the hour when Eugenie has got her easel arranged and begins to draw.

She keeps on her walking attire, and her companions observe that her costume of gray velvet — with large hat and feathers to match — is very becoming.

It is, indeed, one of the few dresses ordered for her trousseau, and her brother had looked surprised when he met her with it on.

For a few minutes she draws quietly ; then she sees a girl artist, to whom she goes to speak. Presently she walks up to another ; and Leon, whose suspicions are allayed, begins listlessly to look at the statues near to which he stands.

"I wish you would talk to my brother for a few minutes,"

she whispers to a girl whom she knows better than the rest. Then she introduces them, and presently remarking :

"I must have dropped my handkerchief in the dressing-room," walks out of the gallery into the great hall.

Her brother watches her jealously, but the lady artist makes a remark which politeness compels him to answer, and when he looks round again Eugenie is no longer to be seen.

In that one moment she has escaped from him.

Swiftly she walks, not daring to run, to the great gates; here she finds a hansom cab, into which she steps, telling the man to drive her to Regent's Park; and before her flight is discovered she is in the church, standing at the altar with Laurence Trevor, repeating after the clergyman the solemn words that make her his wife.

CHAPTER VI.

We must return to our heroine, whom we left walking by the side of Mr. Gilbert Tavenner so long as Lord Claude Irongate could watch them.

Once beyond his sight and reach, however, Hetty becomes conscious of the imprudence of a girl in her station in life being seen walking with a gentleman, and she suddenly stops, and looking up to his face she says, simply :

"I am very grateful to you, sir, for your kindness toward me, but now I must go home alone."

"Perhaps you are right," he replies, looking upon her lovely face, and feeling how great a temptation her beauty and her artless innocence have for him, "but I can go a little farther with you."

"I would rather you did not, if you please," she says, with quiet dignity. "But I beg to thank you again for coming so far."

"No thanks are due to me, my child; it has given me

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pleasure to walk with you," he returns. "But I hope I shall see you again soon."

To this she makes no direct reply, though a faint blush suffuses her sweet face, and her eyelids droop as she curtsies to him, and, without another word, turns away, and walks steadily in the direction of Stanmoor.

She has not proceeded far before she meets Jem Blake, one of the men engaged in the stables at Stanmoor.

This man was the lodger who had the one vacant room which the Hamblins could spare in their small house in Fig street, Chelsea. He had followed them from London, though he no longer lives in their house, and he has a room over one of the stables, but he rarely lets a day pass by without trying to exchange a few civil words with Mrs. Hamblin or with Hetty.

No one supposes that any more powerful motive than the desire to get work induced Jem Blake to come after the Hamblins to Stanmoor, but something in the man's eyes this afternoon makes Hetty feel glad that Mr. Tavenner is no longer walking with her.

She does not like Jem Blake ; she does not know what it is in him that she dislikes, but her instinct warns her against him, and now, with a careless:

"Good-afternoon, Jem !" she would walk on alone, if he did not turn and join her.

"Going home, Miss Hetty ?" he asks, keeping close to her side.

"Yes," is the brief reply.

"Are you walking for a wager ?" he asks, as she does not pause or slacken her steps.

"No ; but I am in a hurry," she says, impatiently. "I wish you would not keep so close to my side !"

"But I've got something to say to you, Hetty," he persists. "I've had a piece of good luck and I want you to share it with me."

"I'm glad to hear you have had some good luck, Jem,"

she responds, "but you must tell me about it some other time. I can't stay now."

And she determinedly turns down a path leading to the house which is now their home.

"That's just the way she always serves me," mutters Jem, moodily; "she's always in a hurry and can't listen to me. But I will speak to her one day and speak my mind, too."

Meanwhile Hetty has entered the house and has gone direct to her own room. A tumult of conflicting thoughts and feelings agitate her breast.

When she left home a couple of hours ago she went with the light heart and fearless tread of innocent childhood; she has come back with her heart fluttering, her nerves unstrung and with her limbs still aching with the numbness consequent upon fainting for the first time in her life.

But this afternoon has been fraught with new experiences to Hetty.

When she first saw Lord Claude Irongate she admired his golden hair, his blue eyes, his long, drooping mustache and his manly figure, as every woman must do, but seeing more of him made her shrink from the glance of his bold eyes, with an undefined uneasiness, which his conduct to her this afternoon has now deepened into absolute dislike.

But though she dislikes him she is likewise afraid of him. She knows that it is in his power to dismiss her father and her brother from his employment and throw them all back upon the misery and squalor in which the early years of her life were spent, and she wrings her hands helplessly, anxious, above all things, to avoid such a catastrophe.

"I can do nothing but be silent," she muses; "if I don't tell even my mother what has happened, and if I avoid his lordship as much as possible, he may soon get over his vexation and cease to take any notice of me."

She clasps her hands, and looks dreamily through the open window as she says this.

The perfume of roses envelopes her. The garden below is bright with flowers; the country beyond is rich, undulating, and well wooded; to the right she can see cattle grazing, young horses in their paddocks, and away to the left is a dark belt of trees, which hide the mansion of Colnehurst, the seat of the Irongates, from her view.

She has never been inside Colnehurst Castle.

Soon after the Hamblins came to Stanmoor, the housekeeper at the castle, meaning to be kind and condescending, had called to see the trainer's wife, taking a small present of fruit with her, and had invited her to come and take tea with her, and bring Hetty also.

But Mrs. Hamblin politely but firmly declined to do anything of the kind, remarking, with the intention of making her refusal less brusque, that she never went anywhere, and that she did not allow her daughter to go anywhere without her.

This reply so offended the housekeeper that she has not been to Stanmoor since.

"Though I am the wife of a servant, I don't choose to associate with servants," Mrs. Hamblin said disdainfully to her daughter, when the housekeeper had gone; and Hetty cordially approved of the sentiment.

Thus it will be perceived that Hetty is being trained by her mother with prejudices and hopes and aspirations far above her station in life, and that her parent is filling her mind with ideas that may hereafter cause her great misery.

But the mother's great desire is to elevate her daughter above the rank in which she was born.

To achieve this end she would make any personal sacrifice.

She tried hard to awaken in her son's mind a thirst for learning, to fire his soul with the ambition necessary to enable him to force his way up in the world, but poor Chris was too like his father for his mother to make anything of him; and now all her energies are concentrated upon giv-

ing Hetty the education and refinement of a gentlewoman, despite her uncongenial surroundings.

Hetty is very clever with her pencil and brush; she draws figures well, and she is particularly successful in drawing horses.

It may seem an odd subject for a girl to take, but we always do that best with which we are best acquainted, and horses have been more familiar to Hetty than flowers and landscapes from her birth.

One might almost say that Hetty had been born and bred among horses. She is a splendid horsewoman, and her father, who loves her better, perhaps, than he loves any other human being, would not hesitate to let her ride the most high-spirited horse in Lord Irongate's stables.

Very proud is Joe Hamblin of his lovely daughter, but if there is one of her talents more than another of which he is most proud, it is the facility and accuracy with which she will take the portraits of his favorite steeds.

More than once he has brought a golden sovereign to Hetty, as the price paid by the owner of a special horse for the animal's portrait, and Hetty has looked at the money as though it has been fairy gold, that would melt away the moment she touched it.

Joe Hamblin is never tired of talking of his daughter's talent. It is a safe subject upon which to expatiate.

His wife had bound him by an oath never to mention the name of her family, not even to his own children, and he has long since voted it a misfortune, rather than advantage, for a man in his position to have married a lady.

So he is not proud of his wife, but his daughter is a part of himself. She bears his name, she inherits his good looks, even though she may likewise resemble her mother, and any honor bestowed upon her must likewise reflect credit upon him.

Thus it happens that with a view of distracting her thoughts from the difficulties that may arise from Lord

Claude's discomfiture this afternoon, and possibly still more from dreaming about Gilbert Tavenner's splendid face, Hetty turns resolutely from the window and, seating herself at a table, upon which are her drawings, crayons, and paints, she begins to apply herself to the task of finishing the portrait of Paris, the most valuable horse in Lord Claude's stables.

She is painting this portrait to please her father. She has made several "studies" of the beautiful animal; the oil painting, which is a small one, is nearly finished, and she is so intent upon her work that she does not hear her mother's footstep, as the latter comes into the room.

"I thought you were out," says the voice at her side, which startles her.

But she replies, nervously:

"Yes; I went for a walk, but I came back a little while ago, and I want to get this done to-day. Will you send Molly up with a cup of tea to me, mother?"

"Yes," replies Mrs. Hamblin, sweetly; "and you are right to work when you feel you can do it."

Then, after a pause, she says, earnestly:

"I am glad to see you have taken up a special line of your own, Hetty; you may not be much of an artist, when compared with the great masters who are world-famous, but you excel in drawing the horse marvelously for one of your age, and though you may never achieve wealth or fame, you will always be able to earn your daily bread."

"The woman who pick weeds in the fields are able to do that, mother," retorts the girl, to whom "her daily bread" seems a matter of slight importance — it having always been provided for her.

"Yes, but how do they earn it?" says her mother, sternly. "By the sweat of their brow, the aching of their limbs, the numbing of their intellects, the deadening of their moral perceptions. But I see," she adds, changing her tone suddenly from deep earnestness to one of light

banter, "you expected me to prophesy that you will in time become a second Rosa Bonheur. Very well, I have no objection; all things are possible to those who work and can wait for them."

"I shall be satisfied to be much less than Rosa Bonheur," replies Hetty; "though I hope to do more than earn my daily bread. But I want my tea, mother; you will send it up, won't you?"

"At once," is the reply; and Hetty is again alone.

All through that summer evening, till the sun sets and darkness comes over the land, Hetty works at the portrait of Paris.

She is working to drive away or stifle her own thoughts, quite as much as to finish the portrait of the horse; and in the morning she rises early, works again at it for a couple of hours, and, when her father comes in at eleven in the morning for his cheese and ale, she is able to give him the portrait finished.

"Never saw anything like it in my life," says Joe Hamblin, surveying the painting with unspeakable pride. "Why that is Paris to the very T. He looks as if he was going to walk, don't he, wife? And there's just that wicked roll of the eye that he's got when he's up to mischief. 'Tis a wonderful picture, let anybody as likes say that it isn't."

Hetty listens with pleasure to her father's remarks; it is gratifying to have one's work praised, even by one whose judgment one does not appreciate highly, but she turns to her mother, to whose opinion she attaches much more value, as the latter says:

"Yes, the portrait is undoubtedly good; but as a work of art the picture is not a success. But never mind, Hetty, better luck next time."

Whereupon Joe exclaims, impatiently:

"I calls this a work of art, and of nature, too, and I wouldn't give a fig for the opinion of them as doesn't."

So saying, he snaps his fingers defiantly, and, carrying

the small oil painting with him, he walks out of the room.

Two days after this Joe startles his wife and daughter by saying at dinner-time :

"Hetty, I've got a commission for you — that's what the gentleman called it."

"A commission, father ?" asks the girl, incredulously.

"Yes ; you're to paint the portrait of a horse for Mr. Tavenner, of Hindfleet Hall."

"For Mr. Tavenner ?" repeats the girl, timidly, while a beautiful blush suffuses her lovely countenance. "How should he know anything about me ?"

"Why, in this way," replies her parent, complacently. "I sent your portrait of Paris up to Colnehurst, for Lord Claude to look at, but he wasn't at home. He's gone to London and they don't know when he will be back again. But Lady Daphne looked at it, and Mr. Gilbert Tavenner happened to be there, and he took a great fancy to it ; and he said he'd gladly give five pounds for the portrait of his father's old charger, Nestor ; and he came out to speak to me, and we settled it all between us, and you are to go up to Hindfleet to-morrow morning to make the first sketch."

"But I can't go alone," protests Hetty, blushing deeply.

"Of course not ; I shall go with you," says Mrs. Hamblin, promptly.

Then, turning to her husband, she asks :

"Who is this Mr. Tavenner ?"

"I don't know much about him," is the reply ; "he lives at Hindfleet Hall with his mother, and they do say he'll be Duke of Boldcastle when his grandfather dies."

"Ah !" gasps Mrs. Hamblin, trembling, while her face becomes ashy in its hue ; "and you say his mother is alive ?"

"Yes ; do you want to see her ?" asks Joe, a trifle insolently.

"No ; why should I want to see her ?" is the reply. "But

Hetty shall not go to Hindfleet alone; if she goes there to-morrow morning, I shall accompany her."

"Very well," he says indifferently; "I don't suppose anybody will object."

So it is settled; but on the following morning Mr. Gilbert Tavenner looks very blank indeed when Hetty Hamblin appears, accompanied by a thickly-veiled woman, whom she introduces as her mother.

He expected she would come alone, or with no other escort but her father, who could easily be sent about his business.

But this tall, darkly-veiled woman cannot be disposed of so summarily and he is conscious that she is watching him so closely that he cannot say a single word to Hetty without her mother hearing it.

Love laughs at locksmiths, however; laughs also at strict duennas; and Gilbert Tavenner is mischievously determined to outwit the thickly-veiled woman who sits mute as a statue, keeping guard over the girl whose sweet face has haunted his sleeping and waking moments since that hour when she rushed madly across the weir to escape from Lord Claude, and he clasped her warm, breathing form in his extended arms.

He remembers that scene but too well; it comes back vividly to his memory now, and he half wonders, as he watches the play of light upon her lovely countenance, if she would fly from him with such determined aversion, if he tried to kiss her, as she showed to his neighbor and friend.

"Many a man would think the world well lost," he muses, "to call such a sweet girl as that his own; but such happiness is not for me; to me she is forbidden."

Then he turns and walks sadly away, half—but only half—determined to see her no more, and thus avoid what to him may prove a terrible temptation.

CHAPTER VII.

THAT visit to Hindfleet Hall, to enable Hetty to take the portrait of "Nestor," had a depressing and lasting effect upon Mrs. Hamblin.

She said nothing about it at the time; she spoke to no one while there, and she kept her face well covered with a thick lace veil, but when she reached home she became hysterical, and wildly vowed she would never go to Hindfleet again.

For so quiet and self-contained a woman, this outburst is the more remarkable, and Hetty wonders at it; though, when her mother recovers, she does not venture to ask the cause of her extreme agitation.

But there are no more visits to Hindfleet for her or her mother. Joe Hamblin manages this; and, when Hetty again wants a sitting, Nestor is sent over to Stanmoor for the purpose.

He is an old horse, he has outlived his master, whom he carried on the battle-field. But he is not decrepit; in other hands he would still be made to work, and Hetty and he soon become fast friends. He will eat sugar and bread from her hand; he does not disdain an apple, and he dearly loves a bowl of ale, with which she sometimes regales him.

So the portrait progresses; but the fair girl and the old charger make a far finer picture than the young artist will ever paint.

This is the opinion of Gilbert Tavenner, as one morning he walks into that portion of the garden at Stanmoor where Nestor and the maiden are standing side by side, the head of the horse resting upon her shoulder, as she feeds him from her hands.

Tavenner's unexpected presence startles both alike.

The horse recognizes his master, and neighs a welcome; and Hetty, covered with sweet confusion, blushes and

droops her long eyelashes till they sweep her cheek, as she bows humbly before him.

Such a reception would be embarrassing if Gilbert could not pat the horse affectionately, and say, in an ordinary tone :

"Good-morning, Miss Hetty ; I thought I would look in as I came by to see how you are getting on with Nestor's portrait."

"Thank you, it is nearly finished, sir," she replies, brightly, quickly recovering her self-possession, and turning to the easel, upon which stands the oil painting. "I think I have caught the expression of the face, don't you ?" she asks, lifting her own starlike eyes to meet his, and read his answer in them.

"Admirably ! Admirably !" he replies. But it seems as if he is thinking more of her beauty than of the excellence of her work ; and presently, becoming conscious, through her half turning her head away, that he had been looking at her too intently, he says, gently :

"You and Nestor seem to have become fast friends."

"Yes, I love horses," she replies, with spontaneous warmth ; "and they like me. The most impatient horse will let me mount him."

"Then you do ride ?" he asks, with interest.

"Oh, yes ; I can ride almost anything," she replies, with a low, rippling laugh.

"I have never seen you do so," he rejoins, watching the changing beauty of her animated face, and noticing how the sunlight falls upon and tinges with dark gold her bronze-brown hair.

"Oh, no, I could not ride Lord Claude's horses!" she says, quickly, an unconscious pride and dignity transforming her in one moment from a timid, bashful girl into a resolute, haughty woman.

"Do you mean that he would object to your doing so?" he asks, pursuing the subject farther than she desires.

"I don't know," she replies, with a troubled countenance; "but I should object to accept such a favor at his hands; and even if I did not, my mother would not allow it."

"Your mother looks after you very carefully," he says, with a smile.

"Yes, she loves me," replies Hetty, with a tender light in her eyes, which tempts him to say, impulsively:

"She could not help doing that!"

Hetty does not reply. It is the tone in which the words are uttered, not the words themselves, which gives them meaning; and, feeling that the interview has lasted long enough — though she would like still to prolong it — she turns to her easel, takes up her palette and brush, and begins to paint.

"This is Nestor's last sitting, is it not?" asks Tavenner, with an amused smile.

"Yes, that is why I was petting him," she answers, gravely. "I was thinking that perhaps I should never see him again."

"He is old, certainly," assents Tavenner; "but he is not likely to die just yet, so I don't see why you should not see him. I" ——

Then he pulls himself up suddenly, remembering the social gulf that yawns between them. A gulf which Hetty cannot cross over unaided, and across which it is not for him to stretch out his hands to help her.

"Here is my mother," says Hetty at this juncture, and Gilbert Tavenner turns with some curiosity to look at the woman who was so closely veiled when she came to Hindfleet that he could not distinguish her features.

And this curiosity deepens as she approaches. She is attired in a dark stuff gown, almost black in its hue, with no ornaments save a plain white linen collar and cuffs. But as he gazes at her he can better understand that she is the mother of the fair girl, whose beautiful face so constantly

haunts him, than that she is the wife of Joe Hamblin, the trainer.

Many women, when they marry as this poor lady had done, try to throw aside all traces of their past life, and willfully and intentionally sink to the husband's level.

But Mrs. Hamblin's infatuation had not lasted long enough for this.

Before the habits and instincts of a gentlewoman could leave her she had awakened from her dream. She had come back to her right mind as one may recover from a fit of mania, and because it was too late to retrace the step she had taken she clung with the greater tenacity to all in herself that remained of her old life.

Gilbert Tavenner lifts his hat as she approaches to speak to him, and a slight flush comes over the unhappy woman's pale cheeks as she says, in a soft, musical voice, and with the pronunciation of an educated woman:

"Good-morning, sir. You have come to see Hetty's work, I suppose?"

"Yes," he replies; "the painting is nearly finished, I see, and it bids fair to be a good likeness. I was going to ask if your daughter is equally fortunate in painting dogs."

"No," says Mrs. Hamblin, promptly; "she paints nothing so well as a horse."

"I am sorry for that," he says, quietly. "My mother has a pet dog, whose portrait she would like to have before he grows older, and I was thinking Miss Hetty might paint it for her."

"You are very kind," returns Mrs. Hamblin, courteously; "but Hetty is a little more than a child, and has not much artistic talent; she has just a knack of catching the portraits of horses, because she loves them so well; but she will need long years of training and of earnest study before she becomes a successful artist."

Hetty looks from the speaker to Mr. Tavenner as these words are uttered.

Her glance is appealing; there is a suspicious moisture in her eye, and he, promply responding to it, says:

"I don't agree with you, madam; your daughter possesses singular talent for one so young; with perseverance and hard work she must overcome all difficulties. What is it, Hamblin!"

This last to Joe, who has made his appearance with a smirk on his good-looking face, as though he had said to himself, "Why should not I join the fine company?"

The gentleman's question pulls him up as it were; warns him not to forget his place, and he touches his hat as he replies, civilly:

"Nothing, sir. I'm only come to see how my little girl is getting on with her picture."

"It is nearly finished," replies Tavenner, coldly. "When it is ready you can bring it to Hindfleet, and I will pay you for it. Good-morning!"

He lifts his hat to Hetty and her mother with studied courtesy, nods to Joe, and walks back into the lane which will take him into the high-road.

"Don't think much of him," remarks Joe Hamblin, looking after his retreating figure. "Lord Claude is worth a dozen of him, with his grand ways. Did he find fault with your picture, Hetty?"

"No; he seemed pleased with it," is the reply. "But I am not satisfied with it myself."

Then, thinking to change the subject to safer ground, she says:

"You and Chris are going to Epsom to-morrow, aren't you, father?"

"Yes, I suppose, so," he answers, doubtfully. "I'm waiting for a telegram from his lordship. Ah, here he is," he adds, in a tone of satisfaction, as he perceives Lord Claude Irongate coming toward the house.

He goes to meet his master, and Hetty tries to give her whole attention to her painting. She quite expects that his

"So you thought to run away from me, did you?" he asks, flinging his arms around her waist.

lordship will turn with her father and go to the stables, and that for some time, at any rate, he will take no notice of her, for they have not met since that day, more than a fortnight ago, when she escaped from him over the weir.

Indeed, Lord Claude has been absent from Colnehurst since that day, and probably would not be back now if Paris had not been entered for the Derby, which will be run next week, and Joe Hamblin and his son were now waiting for certain orders which could scarcely be conveyed in a letter.

But if Hetty supposes that Lord Claude is abashed at his own conduct, she is quite mistaken; his eye has quickly wandered from her father to herself. Her occupation surprises him, for he has not seen the portrait of Paris, and he cannot, for the moment, understand why old Nestor is tethered on the lawn.

So, with a careless remark to his trainer, he walks up to where Hetty is standing, looks over her shoulder at the painting, and asks, with the assured insolence of one who has a right to put the question:

"What are you doing here?"

"I am painting," replies the girl, her face flushing and her hand becoming unsteady with the consciousness of his near presence.

"So it seems," he returns, in a tone which sounds like a sneer.

Then he asks, suddenly:

"Is that one of my horses?"

"No," she answers, nervously.

"Whose is it?" he demands.

"Mr. Tavenner's," she returns.

"And this painting is for him?" persists his lordship, sternly.

"Yes," she says, steadily.

She begins to think it is impertinent of him to ask so many questions, but she dare not say so to her father's employer, though the hot blood mounts to her cheek, and her

eyes flash with indignation at his sneering laugh as he says:

"Ah, that is the little game, is it? You two have made the most of my absence!"

"I don't understand you, my lord," exclaimed Hetty, angrily.

"Of course not; you are a sweet piece of innocence," he retorts, savagely.

But he speaks in a low tone, for Joe Hamblin, after waiting a few seconds, has followed him, and he does not want him to hear what he says.

"Don't you think she's doing it well, my lord?" asks Joe, humbly.

"Yes, marvelously well," is the reply, "but this cannot be her first attempt."

"Oh, no, my lord! She's painted the likeness of dozens of my 'osses, but her best is the portrait of Paris; I've got it in the harness-room. I took it to the castle to show you the day you went away, or soon after, and Mr. Tavenner saw it and gave me an order for Hetty to paint his father's charger — that's why he's here; but you won't want him again after to-day, will you, Hetty?"

"No, father," is the low-toned answer.

"It doesn't matter to me how often the horse comes here," returns Lord Claude, loftily; "but, as he comes, I suppose his master comes, too."

"Mr. Tavenner has only been here once, sir, and that was just now," asserts Joe, sturdily.

His lordship's tone seems to imply that no one ought to be allowed to come to the house without his permission, and as the use of the house is part of the payment he receives for his services the trainer would be quick to resent any dictation on that subject.

"It is nothing to me how often he comes," says his lordship, superciliously.

Then, without another word, he walks off to the stables,

followed by Joe, and just nods to Mrs. Hamblin, whom he passes on his way.

Joe, and the men under him, have a bad quarter of an hour after this, for Lord Claude is in a bad temper, and as he cannot expend his vexation upon those who have annoyed him, everybody else comes in for a share of his irritability.

He has a good deal to worry him, no doubt, and his temper has not much improved when he steps into the dog-cart in which he came to Stanmoor and drives over to Colnehurst Castle.

Here he arrives just in time for luncheon, and he is less pleased than surprised to find Gilbert Tavenner about to take his place at the head of the table.

His absences from home are so frequent that his aunt and sister have ceased to notice them; but they receive him affectionately whenever he does return, and Tavenner shakes hands with him as though they had met but yesterday.

The meal progresses cheerfully, until the servants have retired; then, when they are alone, Lord Claude asks:

"Are you going to the Derby next week, Tavenner?"

"No, I never attend races, and I never bet," is the quiet reply.

"What a model young man!" laughs Lord Claude, in an unpleasant tone. "But you are right to stay at home when there are so many pretty girls in the neighborhood."

"Pretty girls!" echoes Lady Daphne, jealously; "where are they?"

Gilbert bows gallantly to herself; but she pouts, and says fretfully:

"But I should like to go to the Derby and to the Oaks, too; you are not staying at home for me?"

"No," he replies, gravely: "I am staying at home partly because I have no inclination to go, but principally because I have promised my mother to avoid the family failing and never bet."

"And do you always keep the promises made to your mother?" asks Lady Daphne, angrily.

"Yes, I have always done so hitherto," he replies; but he sighs as he says this, for he knows full well that, but for his promises to his mother, he would not be such a frequent visitor at Colnehurst Castle.

"Can't *you* take us to the races, Claude?" asks Lady Daphne, turning to her brother.

"No, impossible!" he replies, emphatically. "I shall have too much to think about to look after any ladies."

Whereupon Lady Daphne pouts, and Tavenner would change the subject, but Lord Claude is determined to rouse his sister's jealousy, and presently he says:

"You were at Stanmoor this morning, weren't you, Tavenner?"

"Yes," is the reply, "I looked in as I was passing."

He speaks carelessly, but he is conscious that his face flushes, and that Lady Daphne notices it.

"Awfully pretty girl is Hetty Hamblin," remarks Lord Claude, sipping his wine. "Have you seen her, Daphne?"

"No," is the curt reply.

"Clever, too," continues her brother, "though I don't think she will make a fortune by painting."

"Fortunes are not easily made nowaday," remarks Tavenner, trying to keep his temper, and feeling as though he could with pleasure kick his host and prospective brother-in-law, out of the room.

"That isn't a bad portrait of your old horse that she is making!" continues Lord Claude. "What are you going to pay her for it?"

"I offered her father five guineas," is the cold reply.

But Lord Claude is not to be driven from his purpose, and he laughs lightly as he retorts:

"Ah! her father is the honest broker, is he? Not a bad idea. I think I must find a commission for his daughter—unless you can give her something to do, Daphne."

"What can I give her?" asks Lady Daphne, crossly. "I want a maid, it is true, but I don't suppose she is at all qualified for such a post. How old is she?"

"Sixteen or seventeen, perhaps," is the reply, "with a face like a painting by Greuze."

Lady Daphne frowns ere she says, impatiently:

"You always go into raptures over some girl's face, Claude, in which nobody else can discover any beauty, but as you and Gilbert both admire her I suppose she must be something remarkable."

"She is," assents her brother.

But she waits in vain for the disclaimer she expects from Gilbert Tavenner. He does admire Hetty, and he will not deny the fact.

Better, perhaps, for Hetty if he did, for Lady Daphne's jealousy is now thoroughly aroused, and she is resolved, without delay, to go to the trainer's house and judge for herself of the charms of her humble rival.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE day following the preceding conversation, Lady Daphne Irongate persuades her aunt to accompany her to see the trainer's daughter at Stanmoor.

Mrs. Beevor is a simple, kind-hearted old lady, whose control over her niece is purely nominal, and who usually does as she is told, in a docile manner that is perfectly child-like.

Consequently, when she walks into the house at Stanmoor with a sweet smile upon her faded face, Mrs. Hamblin rises to receive her courteously, having no doubt that the visit, however unwelcome it may be, is prompted by kindness.

There are few things more galling to a proud and sensitive woman than to be patronized, to be treated as an

inferior by those with whom she was once on an equality; to be talked to and lectured, as though the speaker were made of finest porcelain and she as commonest delf.

Mrs. Hamblin has hitherto pretty well escaped this kind of thing, for this is the first time she has lived in a house belonging to her husband's employer, and when any well-meaning lady has called with tracts or trifling presents a glance into her eyes has been quite sufficient to tell the visitor that she has no common woman with whom to deal.

But Lady Daphne Irongate has not come here to consider the susceptibilities of her brother's servants; she has come to-day because curiosity and jealousy combined make it next to impossible for her to stay away, and she stares with well-bred insolence when, after offering chairs to both of her visitors, Mrs. Hamblin re-seats herself, and takes up the shirt she was making when they entered.

"You seem to have comfortable quarters here," remarks Lady Daphne, glancing round with some surprise, noting the air of refinement that pervades the apartment, which accords so well with the plainly-dressed, neat-looking woman who seems so little impressed by their presence.

"Yes, thank you," is the quiet reply. "I was unwilling to leave London, but this place seems to suit my daughter, and that to me is everything."

"Ah! it was about your daughter we came here to-day," says Lady Daphne, haughtily. "I want a maid, and if she is qualified I might take her for a month on trial."

"You come here to propose that my daughter shall become a servant!" exclaims Mrs. Hamblin, rising to her feet in her agitation, her pale face flushed with indignation, her air and manner that of an outraged queen.

A man might be impressed by her dignity and pride, and some women would respect her feelings, but Lady Daphne Irongate comes of a bad race, and as the angry mother grows excited she becomes cruelly calm, and she asks, in a cool, insolent tone:

"And why not? Her father is a servant, and I presume that you have been a servant; you have the tone and manners that only a lady's maid could have copied from her mistress."

For once, and not for the only time in her life, Lady Daphne Irongate overshoots her mark.

The words, intended to humiliate Mrs. Hamblin, instantaneously recall her to herself.

She becomes calm, as suddenly as she had become excited; she resumes her seat, takes up her stitching, and says calmly and quietly:

"No doubt you mean kindly, Lady Daphne, but I must decline your offer; my daughter is not qualified for the position you intend for her."

"I suppose she can learn!" retorts the young lady, tartly.

"No, she cannot learn that," is the resolute response.

"You mean that you will not allow her to come to me as a servant!" exclaims Lady Daphne, losing her temper as Mrs. Hamblin becomes cool.

"If you will put it in that way," replies the trainer's wife, quietly, "I do."

"I suppose you expect that your daughter will marry a peer, because she is reputed to be pretty," sneers Lady Daphne, unable any longer to conceal her spite and her jealousy.

"Peers do not visit us," replies Mrs. Hamblin, quietly and with a provoking smile; "and my daughter is only sixteen — much too young, as you will perceive, to wait upon your ladyship, or to think of marriage."

"Where is she?" demands Lady Daphne, in a tone which tempts Mrs. Hamblin to retort sharply; but she controls her temper, and replies, calmly:

"She has gone to Colneford and will not be back for some time."

"Then our staying here any longer is useless," says Lady

Daphne, insolently. "But send her to the castle to me to-morrow ; I wish to see her."

To this Mrs. Hamblin makes no reply, and Lady Daphne, if she were sensible, would accept her silence for what it is worth.

But Lord Claude's sister has been accustomed to dictate to the wives and families of the laborers on her brother's estate, and, though she feels now that this is no ordinary woman with whom she has to deal, she is too exasperated to withdraw from the contest with dignity, and she asks, sharply :

"Do you hear what I say ?"

For a moment Mrs. Hamblin hesitates, then she says, firmly and with quiet dignity :

"Yes, Lady Daphne ; I hear you."

"Then see that you obey me," is the imperious command.

And her ladyship would sweep out of the house feeling that she had had the best of it, if the trainer's wife did not say, resolutely and calmly :

"You must pardon me, my lady, but you can have nothing to say to my daughter that will be for her comfort or welfare ; and I decline to send her to you to be spoken to as you are speaking to me."

"If you do not obey me, my brother shall dismiss your husband from his service this very week," is the undignified threat that Mrs. Beevor tries to hush, and which provokes Mrs. Hamblin to say, angrily :

"That is their business, not mine !"

Then, without another word, she turns and walks into an inner room, leaving the two ladies to find their way out of the house as well as they can.

"I never was so insulted in my life !" cries Lady Daphne, on her way to the carriage that is waiting for them.

Her face is flushed all over, and her pale blue eyes gleam with rage.

It is a misfortune in a family when all the beauty goes to

the sons, and the daughters are proportionately plain ; this is the case with the Irongates.

Lord Claude is exceptionally handsome, and so is his brother — the Earl of Tonwater, but Lady Daphne is not even good-looking ; she is six-and-twenty too, and has already lost the fresh charm of her youth.

Her brother, whom they meet riding toward Stanmoor, mentally thinks how much she has gone off in her looks during the past six months, and he sees at once, from the expression of her countenance, that something has occurred to seriously annoy her.

Not wishing to share her vexation, he would pass her carriage with a salutation ; but she orders the coachman to pull up, and, calling her brother to her side, she says, imperiously :

"Claude, I have been insulted by that woman at Stanmoor ; and I hope you will oblige me by dismissing her husband from your service without delay."

"Out of the question, my dear," is the brotherly response. "Hamblin is most useful to me, and his wife is a very superior woman. It is impossible that she can have insulted you."

"But I tell you that she has done so," asserts his sister, passionately.

Whereupon Lord Claude shrugs his shoulders and says, carelessly :

"We will talk about it another time," and, lifting his hat, he rides on, amused rather than distressed by the manner in which Lady Daphne flings herself back in the carriage and calls in a sharp voice to the footman :

"Home !"

Not a word of what has passed between his sister and himself is spoken of by Lord Claude when he reaches Stanmoor.

He has a lengthy conference with Joe Hamblin, who is to go to Epsom with Paris, the horse entered for the Derby,

and he spends a good half-hour in talking to Chris, who is to ride the animal, and whose fortune will be made if he wins the race.

Probably his lordship is fatigued with so much talking, for, instead of mounting his horse when he has gone his round of the stables, he says to Joe, casually:

"I feel rather fagged to-day; I shall go round to the house and ask your wife to give me a cup of tea."

"She'll be proud to do so, my lord," is the ready response; "but I'll send and tell her you are coming."

"Certainly not; I'm sure to find her in," returns Lord Claude, courteously.

Then he walks in the direction of the house, feeling satisfied that neither Joe nor Chris will think of joining him.

He finds Mrs. Hamblin by the window in the sitting-room, her head bowed till it is half hidden among the flowers, her hands covering her face, upon which there are still the distinct traces of tears.

Remembering what his sister had said to him, he can guess the cause of her grief, but he pretends not to observe her agitation, and he says, cheerfully and cordially:

"Mrs. Hamblin, I have a headache, and I have come to beg a cup of tea."

"With pleasure, my lord," she replies, her face lighting up like the sun shining after an April shower.

"You will find this a very comfortable chair," she adds, pushing one to a spot where he will get the breeze from the window; "you shall have your tea in a few minutes."

Then she leaves him, and Lord Claude leans back in the chair indicated and surveys the apartment critically and thoughtfully.

Simple though the furniture is, there is an air of refinement about the apartment that strikes him at once. Hetty's easel stands in one corner, there are flowers in simple vases, a few plaster casts bought for a mere trifle from some wandering Italian; the floor of the room is stained and

polished, and the fire-place is filled with growing ferns and flowers.

"'Pon my word, I prefer it to some of the rooms in the castle," he thinks, with a satisfied smile; "and the mother is a wonderful woman, too, one of whom no man need be ashamed. It is the men folk that are unpresentable; if young Chris would break his neck and Joe would drink himself to death, one might very easily put up with Hetty and her mother. Sweet little Hetty! she has kept silent I know about the kiss that I didn't get, that is a secret between us, and I shall win her round in time to give me as many kisses as I desire. But I must get the mother on my side, or Tavenner will steal a march upon me."

He closes his eyes as he comes to this conclusion, the better to appear as though his head was giving him great pain.

Every moment he expects that Hetty will come into the room, and then he feels sure that her sympathy for his present sufferings will quickly overcome any resentment which she may still cherish against him.

But Hetty does not come; and speedily her mother returns to the room, followed by her maid Molly, who carries a tray upon which is a small china cup and saucer, teapot, sugar-basin, and some thin bread and butter, and who stares in amazement at the worked tea-cloth which her mistress spreads upon the round table.

"You are not going to make me take my tea alone, Mrs. Hamblin?" says his lordship, glancing at the single cup.

"Thank you, I shall have mine later on," she replies, courteously. "Hetty has gone to Colneford, and I will wait for her."

"But you must have a cup of tea with me," he persists. "I want to chat with you, and it is impossible to talk when I am drinking alone."

Mrs. Hamblin's face becomes a shade paler when he says he wants to talk with her. Lady Daphne's threat is still

fresh in her mind; her angry voice still seems to ring through her ears, and she feels sure that Lord Claude is going to say something about his sister's visit.

But she reflects that he cannot mean to be very disagreeable, or he would not come in this friendly fashion; so a second cup is brought, and presently she is drinking tea with his lordship, as though she were a lady entertaining an ordinary guest.

How Lady Daphne's blood would boil with indignation if she could look in upon them! Fortunately, there is no chance of her doing so, and for a few minutes nothing more interesting transpires than questions about the tea being to his lordship's liking, and inquiries about the suppositious headache.

Presently he says:

"My sister was here this afternoon, was she not?"

"Yes, my lord," is the reply.

"Do you mind telling me what she came about?" he asks, gently; then, seeing Mrs. Hamblin's color rise and her eyes grow dark with excitement, he adds, hastily:

"I don't want to hear any of the discussion, you know; nothing disagreeable. She lost her temper; perhaps you lost yours. I know I often lose mine with her. But just tell me why she came and what you differed about."

But Mrs. Hamblin is still too angry with Lady Daphne to comply strictly with this request, and she says, indignantly:

"Lady Daphne threatened to dismiss my husband from your lordship's service, because I refused to send my daughter to the castle or allow her to become her ladyship's maid."

"Preposterous!" laughs Lord Claude. "She threatens what she cannot perform; but the fact is she is jealous of Hetty, and I am afraid I helped to make her so."

"You, my lord!" exclaims Mrs. Hamblin, in displeased surprise.

"Yes I," he replies, with contrition. "The fact is," he continues, with seeming frankness, "I admire Hetty greatly; I don't think I ever saw a more lovely face, or a more graceful figure, and last evening I was foolish enough to say so. My sister took alarm — it is to her interest to keep me unmarried until she is married herself; and even then I need scarcely tell you she would not like me to marry your daughter; so I suppose she came to-day to see for herself whether or not her fears were unfounded."

"What you tell me, my lord, seems scarcely consistent with your sister's desire to have Hetty at the castle, where you would frequently see her," objects Mrs. Hamblin, incredulously.

"Oh, my sister would have taken very good care of that," he replied, "but I am glad you refused. Hetty is far too sweet and lovely to be subject for an hour to my sister's caprice."

"I am sorry to hear you speak of Hetty with admiration, my lord," returns the trainer's wife with dignity; "my daughter is a good girl, her beauty is her misfortune, not her fault, and unless you give me your word of honor not to breathe a word of flattery or of love to her, I shall feel it my duty at any — at every sacrifice, to take her away to some place where you can never find her."

"Listen to me, Mrs. Hamblin," Lord Claude cries eagerly; "my intentions toward your daughter are strictly honorable — I love her, I hope to marry her; but you must know that my family will oppose me in every possible way. My sister has no home except with me; she has quarreled with my brother's wife, and therefore until Lady Daphne marries I cannot turn her out of my house. But she is engaged to Mr. Tavenner; I hope they will soon be married, and then, whoever stands in the way, I will come forward openly as Hetty's suitor.

Mrs. Hamblin breathes quickly, her pale cheek flushes, her eyes swim with the rush of feeling that comes over her;

for the dream that has haunted her married life seems about to be fulfilled.

She sacrificed her position, cast all the world aside to marry the man with whom she was infatuated; she did a cruel wrong to herself and to the innocent children who where subsequently born to her, but now she believes that Dame Fortune is going to turn the tables again, and Hetty is to step back into such a place as might have been her birthright but for her mother's folly.

This is what Mrs. Hamblin has hoped for, prayed for, and dreamed about for so many long years; and, as she listens to Lord Claude Irongate, she does not doubt his sincerity, still less does she question that Hetty's happiness will be secured by accepting the brilliant destiny which he promises to offer her.

CHAPTER IX.

MEANWHILE Hetty has executed her mother's commissions in Colneford, and instead of returning home by the dusty high-road she makes her way to the bank of the winding river, along which, for a considerable distance, is a footpath, shaded by tall trees.

It is very pleasant walking here, particularly as she is alone.

The river looks so deep and calm and peaceful; the country on the opposite bank of the stream rises gently in low hills, until far away in the distance the trees seem to stand on tiptoe to touch the sky.

On the side of the river along which Hetty is walking there are fields and pasture lands, but Hetty observes that the cows have been driven home, and she judges from that circumstance alone that it is later than she supposed, and she begins to quicken her pace.

This is a public path, but Hetty has only met a few women carrying baskets, on their way to town, until, after

getting over a stile, she sees a man, some little distance ahead, but coming toward her.

If she had not been so terribly frightened a couple of weeks ago by Lord Claude Irongate, she would think nothing of meeting a stranger, but though it is not his lordship who is approaching her she does feel timid, and she walks slowly and hesitates, more than half inclined to turn back.

This inclination to fly becomes greater when something in the tall figure that is approaching strikes her as familiar and, almost simultaneously, she recognizes him as Mr. Gilbert Tavenner.

Why does Hetty's foolish little heart flutter as she realizes that she is momentarily coming nearer to the man who has always treated her with marked kindness and deference ?

She is not afraid of him in the ordinary sense of the word ; if she were compelled by any extraordinary circumstance to place her trust in any man, not connected with her by the ties of kindred, she would choose this one of all others, feeling no doubt that he would alike respect her innocence and her helplessness. And yet, she fears to meet him.

Her heart beats wildly and in a most unruly fashion ; her frame quivers, and a warm, bright blush dyes her cheeks and heightens her beauty, as Mr. Tavenner's face also changes when he quickens his pace to meet her.

Any third person looking at the eager light in the young man's eyes, at the blushing cheeks and downcast eyes of the timid girl, would read the secret which, if spoken in words, would startle both of them, possibly to the extent of an indignant denial.

But there the feeling is, unrealized as yet by either, though Hetty is conscious that there is something wrong somewhere when Mr. Tavenner takes her hand in his own, as though she were a lady friend, and asks after her health with quite unnecessary solicitude.

If you could transport them to the wilds of Africa or to some primitive island in the Pacific Ocean, where wealth and rank and high birth count for nothing, the superior position would be on the girl's side, and her youth and beauty would count for more than the man could offer unless she loved him.

But here in England, where we say — though few believe — that

> "Kind hearts are more than coronets;
> And simple faith, than Norman blood."

things are reckoned differently, and any one knowing the respective positions of the man and girl, and seeing that hand-shake, would draw conclusions, unjust no doubt, but decidedly unflattering to both of them.

Hetty feels this rather than knows it, and she withdraws her hand quickly from the warm clasp, and replies, meekly:

"I am quite well, thank you, sir."

"Where are you going?" he asks, slightly sobered by her tone, but unwilling to part with her.

"I am going home," she replies. "I have been to Colneford for my mother, and this path is so much more pleasant than the dusty roads."

"Quite true," he answers, gently; "it is so pleasant that I came down here for a stroll. But I will turn and walk with you — at any rate, part of the way."

He adds this, as she makes a sign of disapprobation, but Hetty says, resolutely:

"Don't think me rude or ungrateful, sir, in asking you not to come any farther with me; but people will make unkind remarks, and my mother has always taught me not only to do what is right, but to avoid even the appearance of evil."

"Your mother is a wise woman," he says, with a regretful sigh, "though I doubt if she has always been so," he

adds, with a bitter laugh. "However, I must obey you, since you wish it. Good-day."

He lifts his hat as he speaks, and passes on; and Hetty, bowing her head, but with a strong desire in her heart to call him back, walks on with the consciousness that she is doing right, however thorny and rugged the path of duty may be.

But she has not proceeded a dozen footsteps before a terrifying sound falls upon her ears.

The low, deep, angry bellow of an infuriated bull, and she looks round in wild alarm, and perceives that Mr. Tavenner has likewise turned, and in a few bounds has gained her side.

"Quick, quick for your life!" he cries, clasping her hand and running in the direction of an oak tree, which stands by a hedge on the farther side of the field.

Hand in hand the man and the girl run at their utmost speed.

They have not far to go; a few minutes will do it all, but those minutes mean life or death to both of them.

For the bull, which had escaped from the town, it being market day, having done considerable damage in its course, had broken through a hedge into this field, and now, catching sight of Tavenner and Hetty, he makes straight toward them.

His tail is high in the air, his eyes look like balls of fire, his rage is manifested in his snorting nostrils, in his angry roar, and to every living creature that comes in sight he is ready to manifest his enmity.

The race between the man and the girl on the one hand and the bull on the other is an unequal one!

Alone, Tavenner might easily escape, but though Hetty's feet are winged with fear the savage animal gains upon them. They seem to hear his snorting in their ears, they feel that every moment may be their last, and still the tree,

in the branches of which they would seek shelter, is several yards ahead.

Never so long as they live will these fearful moments, fraught with such deadly terror, be forgotten!

The snorting, bellowing monster is close upon them. Three seconds more and one or both would be flung high in the air, or gored to death, when the welcome sound of a dog's bark falls upon their ears. The bull's course is arrested, his fury is diverted, and in the moments thus gained the tree is reached. Hetty is helped into the branches, and Gilbert Tavenner swings himself lightly up after her!

But poor Bob, Tavenner's bull terrier, has paid the penalty of his life for fastening upon the bull's leg. The latter has rolled over upon him, tossed him in the air, beaten with his four feet upon his mangled corpse; then, his appetite for slaughter increased by this victory, he rushes forward, regardless of pain to himself, and butts with all his mighty strength against the trunk of the tree, in the branches of which Tavenner and Hetty have taken refuge.

"Hold fast!" cries Tavenner, clasping his arm around the girl's waist; and but for this timely protection Hetty would have fallen and have shared the tragic fate of poor Bob.

Facing death together, it is but natural that the social barriers that should divide these two are for the time forgotten by both of them, and Tavenner keeps his hold of the girl's waist, tenderly but firmly, while she, in her terror, buries her face upon his shoulder.

Meanwhile, the bull after butting against the tree again and again, and finding that he cannot dislodge those who have taken refuge in its branches, tears up the ground with his hoofs; and finally, as though resolved not to be cheated of his prey, he lies down at the foot of the tree, waiting for those who are on it to descend.

"My poor child!" says Tavenner, tenderly, looking with

unspoken admiration upon the lovely head which rests so confidingly upon his breast.

She looks up to him as he speaks, and he perceives that, though her cheeks are pale with terror, there is an expression of love and trustfulness in her eyes that sends the warm blood coursing madly through his veins; and Hetty will never be able to appreciate the effort it costs him to refrain from kissing her sweet lips, and telling her how fondly he loves her.

But there are many and manifold reasons why he should not do anything so insane.

First of all, there is his engagement to Lady Daphne Irongate, an engagement arranged by his mother rather than by himself.

And then, if by any lucky chance this engagement were to be broken by Lady Daphne in a fit of temper, there still remains a foolish promise which his mother extorted from him on his coming of age, and by which he bound himself by an oath never to marry a woman who is not of gentle birth.

Strangely enough, since he has known Hetty this last promise has weighed upon him more heavily than his engagement, and he bitterly regrets his weakness in yielding to his mother's whims and prejudices in a matter which his own happiness, and not hers, is concerned.

But the memory of this promise, the ties of honor which bind him to another woman, are pressing heavily upon his mind now, and they strengthen him to resist the sweet temptation that for safety's sake is nestling in his arm.

Even for this close proximity, he finds it necessary for himself, and for her, to make some excuse, and he says, gently:

"I must hold you tight or you would fall, but that monster cannot stay there long surely; he will be missed, or somebody else will attract his attention, and then we shall be able to get away."

"Yes," assents Hetty, "I hope we shall be able to get away soon; my mother will be very anxious about me, and"——

Then she comes to a sudden pause.

The memory of Lord Claude's sneering remark that she and Tavenner have made the most of his absence recurs to her mind, and she knows that he, and other people too, will be very likely to say spiteful and injurious things about her and Mr. Tavenner happening to be together when the bull thus made them practically his prisoners.

Mr. Tavenner does not ask what she was about to say, but presently he remarks, gravely:

"If you can get away without being recognized, when the siege is raised, I would do so if I were you, and would say nothing about it when you get home. Ah! here our relieving army comes!"

And as he speaks, at the most distant corner of the field, at the same gap through which the bull forced his way, a party of men appear, some of them on horseback, while a couple carry lassoes in their hands, ready to capture the bull the moment they can get near enough to do so.

But the monster is not afraid! He recognizes his foes! With a bound and a roar he springs to his feet, and, snorting defiance and bellowing forth his rage, he sets off at full speed to meet his old enemies!

"Now is your time," says Tavenner, promptly, "let me help you down. There, don't be frightened; put your arm round my neck, so that I can lift you. That is right. Poor child, how you are trembling!"

"The bull—is he near?" asks Hetty, nervously.

Tavenner looks over the hedge, and answers, promptly:

"No, he is better engaged than in looking after us. I think they will have to shoot him; but he can't see you—we are on the right side of the hedge this time. Now, make haste home. Good-by; I must look after my poor dog."

He kisses her hand ; that small gratification he cannot deny himself.

Then, without a word, she speeds away, and does not slacken her pace until she comes within sight of Stanmoor.

She looks pale and tired when she enters the sitting-room, in which she finds her mother alone, with tea-things upon the table as though awaiting her return.

Mrs. Hamblin greets her daughter with affection.

"You look tired, my dear. I ought not to have sent you so far, and the day is exceptionally hot. But you shall have a cup of tea, and then I have some news for you."

"News !" repeats the girl, listlessly. "I hope it is good news !"

"It is very good news," is the emphatic reply.

But still Hetty's interest is not excited ; she can think of nothing but the infuriated bull, waiting to gore and trample her to death, as he stamped out the life of the poor dog, whose interference had saved her.

Yes, Hetty thinks with terror of the bull. She thinks also of the kind, strong arms that held her so tenderly ; and her heart throbs as she remembers how he kissed her hand at parting, as humbly and respectfully as though he had been a knight of old and she a maiden of high degree.

What wonder, then, that any news her mother can tell her should seem flat and insipid compared with the tale she could herself unfold ? And she has drank half a cup of tea, and is leaning back in her chair with her eyes closed — lost in sweet dreams — unheeding her mother's words, when the mention of a name startles her out of her reverie, and she looks up suddenly, asking, with startling directness :

"Lord Claude been here to tea with you, mother ? Why did he come ? He had some motive in it, you may be sure."

"He came to talk about you, Hetty," says the proud mother, her face beaming with the glad news of which she is the bearer.

"Of me!" repeats the girl, contracting her brows into a frown.

"Of you, my dear," repeated her mother, with growing importance. "He admires you greatly!"

Mrs. Hamblin pauses to enable her daughter to think for a moment of the happiness of being loved and admired by such a man as his lordship. She is not a little startled, therefore, when Hetty tosses her beautiful head indignantly, and says, with cutting sarcasm:

"Yes, and a very unpleasant way he has of showing his admiration!"

"How — what do you mean?" demands her mother, in sudden alarm.

Then, as Hetty is about to leave the room, she exclaims, in a tone of authority:

"I insist upon knowing what you mean?"

"He tried to kiss me!" replies Hetty, her face flaming with modest shame as she remembers the incident.

"And you," asks her mother, with a smile that exasperates the girls, "what did you do?"

"I ran across the weir in Brent Wood, at the risk of my life, to escape him," is the answer.

"A foolish thing to do," says Mrs. Hamblin, gravely, "particularly as Lord Claude wishes to marry you as soon as he is able to do so."

"I don't wish to marry him, and I never will if I can help it!" asserts Hetty, passionately.

"But you will not be able to help it," asserts her mother, emphatically.

And Hetty waits to hear no more.

CHAPTER X.

THE Derby has been lost and won, and Lord Claude Irongate's Paris, ridden by Chris Hamblin, is the victor.

The news reaches Stanmoor on the evening of the great

race; it is telegraphed to Mrs. Hamblin by her husband, who is, as the wording of the message testifies, in a condition of unbounded delight and excitement at the result.

Hetty reads the telegram with pleasure, for she knows that her brother would have been so terribly cast down had he failed; her father, too, would have been wretched if Paris had come in second or third, and she is conscious, also, that this satisfactory result will add greatly to their material comfort, and will not make her father and brother so dependent upon Lord Claude's whims as they have recently been.

But Mrs. Hamblin treats the good news with indifference; her ambition has taken higher flights than the winning of a few hundreds of pounds upon a race, and it is only when she reflects that Lord Claude will be the richer for her son's success that she takes any pleasure in thinking of it.

There is very little conversation between Hetty and her mother during this week in which such great events are taking place in racing circles.

These two, between whom there has never hitherto been a difference of opinion, are now divided upon one vital subject, upon which both of them are equally determined not to yield.

Mrs. Hamblin has tried entreaties and persuasion, has expatiated largely upon the folly of her own marriage, has pointed out the advantages to be derived from her daughter's union with Lord Claude Irongate, and to all that she can say Hetty's answer, though couched in different words, is practically the same.

"I positively dislike him, mother; I would rather be buried than be married to him."

These words puzzle the mother, but several days pass by before it suddenly flashes across her mind that Hetty's aversion to Lord Claude may possibly be occasioned by her preference for somebody else.

The idea seems to her preposterous, remembering how

very limited is the circle of their acquaintances; but she can think of no other reason for her daughter's obstinacy, and, repugnant as such a step is to her feelings, she resolves to tax Hetty with having some secret lover.

But of whom can she speak; there is nobody, to her knowledge, except Jem Blake, their former lodger, who has shown the least admiration for Hetty, and it does seem to her incredible that her daughter should be more foolish in her choice of a husband than she was herself.

Since that day when Hetty escaped from the bull and was met by her mother with the startling news that Lord Claude wished to marry her, the fair girl has been very careful not to go outside the gardens belonging to Stanmoor, and she has for the greater part of the time shut herself up in her own room, and worked industriously at her painting and drawing.

In thus isolating herself, she tries to drive away thoughts that come unbidden into her mind, and likewise to forget the irritation which she feels when her mother so persistently urges the suit of Lord Claude Irongate.

But her success in this effort to concentrate her mind upon her work is not great, and again and again she finds herself sitting idle, her thoughts having wandered away into dreamland.

It is in this condition that her mother finds her, on this particular afternoon on which Joe Hamblin is to return to Stanmoor.

The mother's jealous eyes observe that the portrait of Nestor is finished, and that her daughter has before her an unfinished sketch of Floss, a small Maltese dog, that was given to her when they left London by Jem Blake.

At any other time Mrs. Hamblin would have been surprised at the talent shown in the sketch, an amount of artistic talent for which she does not give her daughter credit; but now she is thinking only of what she can say or do to make her daughter receive Lord Claude graciously

when he comes again, as he is pretty sure to do in a day or two.

"So, that is your secret, is it?" she asks angrily, as she glances at the easel; and Hetty looks about her quickly and nervously, fearing that in some unguarded moment she may have written down the name of Gilbert Tavenner, or have tried to make a rough portrait of a face which is ever present to her mental vision.

When, however, she understands that it is the sketch of Floss that her mother is speaking of, she smiles, and answers lightly:

"There is no secret here, mother; you said I could not draw dogs, that I had only a knack for drawing horses, and I thought I would just try if I really could not do it."

"Are you making that sketch for Jem Blake?" asks the mother, sharply.

"For Jem Blake!" repeats the girl, in amazement. "No; why should you think I am doing it for him?"

"He gave you the dog," is the laconic reply.

"So he did; but I had quite forgotten it," returns Hetty, with a frank smile.

"And the fellow is always hanging about after you," continues her mother, as though making an accusation.

"Yes, he is; and it is very unpleasant," says Hetty, with a troubled countenance. "I avoid him as much as possible," she continues; "but lately he has been very tiresome."

Then, observing that her mother's brows are still bent into a frown, she adds:

"Perhaps it would be as well if you were to speak to him, mother; it is useless my doing so."

But Mrs. Hamblin brushes away the subject, just as she would brush away a fly that annoyed her.

She sees that Hetty cares nothing for Jem Blake, therefore he has ceased to interest her; but she is come here to discover Hetty's secret, if she has one, and she now asks, pointedly:

"About whom were you dreaming just now, when I entered the room?"

The girl blushes deeply; then she replies, timidly and evasively:

"I was thinking about Lord Claude a little while ago."

"I am glad of that," is the next remark, uttered in a tone that is still a little doubtful; "for the more you think about him the more you must like him."

"I am not at all sure that you are right there," returns Hetty, with a little laugh. "I remember," she continues, "the first time I saw him I thought him wonderfully handsome and I still think him exceedingly good-looking, but for all that I don't like him."

"No, you have seen some one whom you like better," asserts Mrs. Hamblin, with that unpleasant way of knocking the right nail on the head which some people have when they choose to be very disagreeable.

Hetty makes no answer; she cannot deny, she will not admit the truth of the accusation, but she blushes deeply and the tears spring to her eyes with mortification and a sense of injustice — signs which her mother is quick to perceive — and she asks, authoritatively:

"Who is it? I insist upon knowing!"

"I cannot tell you, mother," replies Hetty, quietly but firmly; "but I like almost everybody I know better than Lord Claude."

"You are determined to be perverse," cries her mother, angrily. "You used to be so sweet and gentle and obedient. I cannot understand the change that has come over you."

"Is it not you who are changed, mother?" asks the fair girl, plaintively. "You used to be so kind and tender to me, used to think of my comfort and happiness in all things; and now, because a man whom I dislike says he wishes to marry me, you are harsh and suspicious, and have not a loving word or a pleasant smile for me."

Mrs. Hamblin turns away in silence. The words to

which she has just listened are true, her own conscience convicts her of injustice to the child whom she loves, and though she honestly believes that the union upon which she has set her heart will be for Hetty's happiness, she feels that she has neither acted kindly nor judiciously in pressing it in the manner she has done.

But she is greatly excited; she is pained and grieved, also.

She seems to feel the bitterness of her own social degradation more keenly here in the country, where she sometimes meets those who might have been her equals, than she did in town, where all the people with whom she came in contact were sordid, ignorant or vulgar; and this one bright gleam of hope that had shone in upon her darkened life has made the contrast between the past and the present so great that, weary and worn and sick at heart, she would gladly lie down and die if she could only feel assured that Hetty would one day enjoy all that she has lost.

The burden of her life is great; during the past ten days she has made it greater than it need be. But Hetty's pathetic appeal and her too just reproaches have opened the flood-gates of her heart, broken down the temporary barrier of her severity, and she flings herself on her knees by the side of a chair, and weeps passionately and hysterically.

In a moment Hetty is at her side, trying to soothe her, assuring her of her love, praying her pardon for her reproaches, promising to do anything in her power to save her, anything but marry that man who had once frightened her so much that she will never again feel safe in his presence.

This and much more she tells her mother, and Mrs. Hamblin kisses the agitated girl, tells her that life would indeed be worthless to her without her love, assures her that she has only her happiness at heart, and finally entreats her to put out of her mind all thoughts about

marrying Lord Claude Irongate, and just receive and meet him as a friend.

"It isn't a question of being married at once," urges the mother. "In the first place, you are too young for anything of the kind; and next, his lordship explained to me that he must not take a wife until his sister and Mr. Tavenner are married."

If Mrs. Hamblin were not looking in another direction, she would observe that Hetty starts violently, presses her hands upon her heart, and for a second or two struggles like one stifled with emotion, and gasps for breath.

Instinctively she turns her back upon her mother, so that the latter may not perceive her agitation, and a few seconds elapse before she asks, with seeming indifference:

"Who did you say Lady Daphne is going to marry?"

"Mr. Tavenner, for whom you have painted that picture," replies Mrs. Hamblin, more cheerfully. "They are engaged, Lord Claude told me, and I suppose the marriage will come off soon, though I have no doubt he will have cause to regret it so long as he lives. She is a dreadful woman, and Lord Claude says, truly enough, that he could not bring home a wife while his sister makes his house her home."

"No, I suppose not," assents Hetty, wearily.

And when she speaks again she talks of her father and Chris, allowing it to be inferred, though she makes no promise on the subject, that if Lord Claude Irongate likes to come as a friend he can do so.

Indeed, poor Hetty is so miserable after this that she feels indifferent to everything.

Every day since that afternoon when she escaped from the bull she has expected Mr. Gilbert Tavenner to come to Stanmoor to see her.

She has thought he would be anxious to know how she reached home that day, and that he will wonder if she has recovered from her fright; but he does not come, though

he could make a very good excuse for doing so, by inquiring or making suggestions about the portrait of old Nestor, which she has painted for him.

How long to her have been those days in which

"He cometh not, she said.
My heart is aweary, weary;
I would that I were dead!"

But now she understands why he did not come, she knows now why he kissed her hand at parting, instead of her blushing cheek, and, in the acute bitterness of her first heartache, her keen enjoyment of life is gone, and she feels that it matters little or nothing to her now whom she may marry.

Her mother, seeing her thoughtful and dejected, is conscious that she has gained a victory, and she deems it prudent to leave her daughter alone for awhile.

And when she has gone, Hetty throws herself upon the bed, and lies there pale and tearless as some lovely statue.

But oh, what mental agony she suffers! The agony of misplaced love, of cruel disappointment, of bitter humiliation, of unending regret at having given her love, unsought, unasked for.

It is this latter feeling that numbs her senses, that forbids her to cry out aloud, and thus find some relief for her pent-up agony; for if she moans and sobs and weeps, as she might do for any other grief, her mother would ask the cause of her sorrow, her secret would be discovered, and she would become an object of pity and of scorn to all who know her.

But, as it is, her secret is her own, locked safely in her own breast, and even Gilbert Tavenner himself cannot suspect it.

So she resolves that it shall continue to be; and after a time she rouses herself, she remembers that others besides herself have had to learn:

"How sublime a thing it is
To suffer and be strong."

In the carrying out of this resolve she does not fail, and when her father and Chris return home this evening, both of them excited and one flushed with success, they neither of them observe that any change has come over little Hetty.

If any one called their attention to the fact, they might remark that she is not quite so lively as usual, but then they have so much to say themselves that they rather appreciate a sympathetic listener, and the subject that engrosses their minds is not exhausted when it is time to return to rest.

The next morning, near midday, Hetty is sitting painting under a tree on the lawn, with Floss as her model on a chair a little in front, when the dog suddenly begins to bark, and looking round she perceives Lord Claude Irongate approaching with a bouquet of flowers in his hand.

Had his visit been made yesterday, a great trembling might have come over her, or she might have hastened away, declining to hold any conversation with him. But now she feels too indifferent about everything to heed his presence, and, while her dog runs forward to greet him, she turns to her easel and continues to paint.

Yet, though she does not look at him, she is conscious that he comes nearer, that he is soon close to her side, that the strong perfume of flowers breathes upon her senses, and then a voice that is meant to charm her says, in a low, earnest tone :

"This is my peace offering; you will accept it, Hetty?"

"Thank you, my lord," she replies; and the deed is done.

She has taken his flowers, the flowers that are intended as a token that she will one day accept him.

CHAPTER XI.

We must return to Eugenie, whom we left at the altar of Regent's Park church, after her escape from her brother at the British Museum.

Never in her life had she looked more handsome than she does at the present moment.

Her cheeks are flushed, her large, black eyes are luminous with excitement and with fear, while the impressive marriage ceremony, to which she listens, and in which she takes her part, has the effect of making her unusually quiet and subdued.

Trevor regards her with admiration and with pardonable pride. To his critical taste, her dress of gray velvet and large hat, with its plume of gray feathers, is perfect; and, as they leave the church, without either best man or bridesmaid to attend them, he presses her hand tenderly in his own and whispers, fondly:

"My darling looks beautiful to-day!"

She smiles sweetly, but the noise of the carriages in the street brings back to her mind the terror from which she had fled, and she murmurs, nervously:

"I ran away from Leon. He suspected something, and would not spare me from his sight; he was going to make me marry Carlo di Castro, and take me away to Mexico on Saturday. This is one of my wedding-gowns, and it is the only one I have with me."

"It has been a wedding-gown certainly," he replies, with a smile, "and a very pretty one it is, too. But where is this amiable brother of yours? Where and how did you leave him?"

In a few brief words she tells him of her escape, and he laughs heartily, as he pictures Leon—of whom he has caught a glimpse—fuming passionately at the gates of the British Museum, trying vainly to get some clue concerning the cab in which his sister had escaped.

But, perceiving how nervous Eugenie is at the possibility of again meeting her brother, he says, reassuringly:

"Don't be alarmed; you are my property now, not his. What you have told me need not interfere with the arrangements I have made. Here, step into this cab."

And he helps her into a hansom, seats himself by her side, and gives the order:

"Great Western Railway Hotel."

"This seems like a dream, from which I shall wake up and find Leon and Di Castro waiting for me," whispers Eugenie, looking at her newly-made husband with adoring eyes.

"You will soon get over that, my dear," he replies, with a smile. "I had meant to stay in town to-night and start for Somerset to-morrow; but, under the circumstances, I think we had better leave London this afternoon. We will have some luncheon, and then I'll see about the trains."

"But I have no clothes with me!" she cries, in dismay. "I have nothing but what I have on, and oh, I have some lovely gowns at home, if Leon would only let me have them!"

"We won't trouble Leon for your dresses, my dear," replies Trevor, smiling at her distress; "you can make out a list of things that you need immediately, and a messenger can fetch them while we have luncheon. But here we are!"

A few minutes later, and they are in the hotel, and the moment they are alone Eugenie throws herself into Trevor's arms, murmuring, joyfully:

"My husband—my own real husband!"

He embraces her warmly, tells her she is a dear, sweet, little pet, and treats her rather like a spoilt child than as a grown-up woman, who is to be his companion and helpmate through life.

But Eugenie does not notice this; she is so supremely happy that it would be a rude shock indeed that could

awaken her from her dream of bliss, or rouse in her heart a feeling of discontent.

Later on, she is delighted with Trevor's liberality when he makes her return her purse to her pocket and sends a messenger to order an imperial from a trunk shop and numerous articles of clothing from a well-known draper's, not half a mile distant.

"I am costing you a lot of money to begin with," she says, timidly and shyly.

But he answers, with an amused laugh:

"It is nothing, my dear. I am not a poor man; that is," he adds, correcting himself, "not what some people would call poor."

"Then, don't you paint pictures for a living?" she asks, in surprise.

"Well, not exactly," he answers, evasively. "Of course, I like to sell my pictures if I can get a good price; but I have something to live upon besides what I can earn. If it had not been so, I should not have dared to marry you this morning."

"And if you had been poor, I should have been left with Leon and given to Di Castro," she says, with a shudder. "Oh, I can bless your wealth because it has saved me!"

"You must not call it wealth," he says, gently. "I did not say I was rich; but I am not poor, and there is no necessity for you to deny yourself anything in reason. But now I will go into the station and inquire about the trains, while you make your selection from the piles of clothing the messenger has brought. Pay for the things out of these notes."

And he places two bank-notes, each for twenty pounds, in her hands; then kisses her, and leaves her to look over the contents of the cardboard boxes, which the messenger and the draper's assistant have brought for her inspection.

The selection does not take as long as Trevor anticipated; but when she hands one of the bank-notes as payment her

husband's name is asked, and, to be able to give it correctly, she takes from her pocket the copy of the certificate of marriage which the clergyman had given her a couple of hours ago, with the smiling remark, "That is your property, madam."

When the name is written upon the back of the note, and the assistant and messenger are both dismissed, Eugenie read over to herself the copy of the certificate, the sight of which had made the two persons, to whom she had so innocently shown it, regard her with increased interest.

"It is a strange document," she muses. "I never saw a certificate of marriage before this one. I wonder what Leon would say to it?"

The wonder grows in her mind the longer she looks at the paper.

Added to this comes the memory of love and kindness from her brother, and the feeling that it is due to him, at least, to know what has become of her; but she dare not write to him, dare not send any one to tell him; when suddenly it occurs to her mind that, if she posts this certificate to him, it will prove to his satisfaction that she is honorably married, and free from his control.

The clergyman told her that this paper was her own property. If it is her own she can do what she likes with it.

Her sending it to Leon will stop pursuit, will stop all inquiries, and he and his confederates will be glad to leave her in England, to her English husband.

So she reasons, rapidly, as is her wont; then she takes an envelope, incloses the certificate without a word, addresses and stamps it, then drops it into the letter-box, which she had observed in the hall of the hotel.

Ten minutes more elapse before Laurence Trevor returns, and during this interval the letter-box is cleared out, its contents are carried away, and the certificate is gone beyond her control.

When regret is useless Eugenie would reclaim the certificate if it were possible.

She doubts whether Laurence would approve of the step she has taken, and these doubts merge into certainty when she remembers how he has steadily ignored the claims which her brother may have upon her obedience or her consideration.

Laurence's first remark on his return confirms her in this view, for he says, carelessly :

"It would be more pleasant to put off our journey till to-morrow, but that brother of yours might trace us and make a scene, which must be avoided at all hazards, so I think we had better catch the four o'clock train."

"Oh, yes; let us catch it," she replies, nervously, and she mentally resolves to say she has lost the certificate if she is ever questioned by Laurence about it.

She is the more able to do this because, at the railway station, one of the light-fingered gentry picks her pocket while she is standing on the platform, and when she discovers that her purse and handkerchief are gone Trevor's first question is about the certificate.

"Yes, I put it in this pocket," she replies, nervously, "and there is nothing left, it is quite empty. See."

"What a nuisance!" growls the bridegroom. "One doesn't know into whose hands it may have fallen."

"No, but we can get another," returns the bride, promptly; "it was but a copy, you know. I remember thinking how silly it is in novels for a writer to pretend that, because the copy of the certificate is lost, the marriage cannot be proved. Leon told me you can always get a copy of a marriage certificate at Somerset House, if you like to pay for it."

"You and Leon seem to have discussed the matter very fully," retorts Trevor, in an unpleasant tone.

"Yes, but it has been *apropos* of novels," she explains, sweetly.

And he smiles and kisses her, muttering moodily to himself:

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

The train which carries them away from London is a swift one, but when they alight a long carriage drive follows, and it has been dark for a couple of hours before they pull up before a pretty, detached house, standing in its own grounds, which are picturesque rather than extensive.

Very little of this can be seen at night, but when the hall door is thrown open to receive them Eugenie perceives that the interior of the house is fitted up with elegance and comfort, while the blending of colors and the arrangement of the handsome furniture denote clearly enough that it is the home of an artist.

"How exquisite!" exclaims Eugenie, clasping her hands and looking round the pretty drawing-room, lighted with rose-colored lamps, which throw a soft, warm glow around! "Is this your home, dearest?"

"It will be our home, my dear, for a time," replies Trevor, evasively; "and it is possible that I may buy it. But I am hungry, so take off your hat and let us have dinner."

Eugenie obeys, but every room she enters in this house delights her more and more; she feels that every hour on this eventful day new and pleasant surprises are coming to her, and when, on the following morning, she goes over the house and garden by daylight, she is more delighted than ever with her new abode.

Trevor is amused at her childish frankness; she has developed new charms, of which he was previously ignorant; she is a fair musician, she sings divinely, she paints well, and she can drive the pair of spirited ponies which he buys for her with a masterly hand.

So a month passes by, a month of unalloyed bliss to

Eugenie, who fondly believes that her whole life is to be spent in this delightful fashion.

But Trevor gradually becomes restless and ill at ease, and packets of letters which are forwarded to him at irregular intervals always increase his irritability.

Eugenie, with the watchfulness of love, perceives that something disturbs him, but she dare not ask the cause; she can only fondle and pet him, and try to drive from his mind the thoughts that perplex his soul.

For a time she succeeds; but one day, after receiving another batch of letters, he startles her with the unexpected words:

"I shall have to go to town to-morrow, my dear; I have put it off as long as I could. You will be able to amuse yourself in my absence, won't you?"

"Oh, no!" cries Eugenie. "I cannot stay here alone! Let me go with you!"

"Impossible!" he replies, gravely and with an inflection of firmness in his tones. "You cannot go with me!"

"But I shall go mad if I stay here alone!" she cries, passionately and bursting into tears. "I shall sit and think and think till my brain will go; and I shall expect every time the door opens that my brother and Di Castro will walk in and drag me away to Mexico, and hide me in some place where you and I could never meet again!"

"Your brother could not do that," returns Trevor, disdainfully. "He would not dare to attempt it!"

"Ah! you do not know Leon de Mæstro when you say that there is anything he would not dare to do," she moans, sadly.

And she clasps her hands upon her lap and droops her head, deep dejection written in every line of her face and figure.

This hint as to the character of her brother has a greater effect upon Trevor than all her pleading.

He contracts his brows, mutters something between his

teeth — anything but complimentary to the Mexican desperado — and he finally says, aloud :

"Your going with me to-morrow is impossible. We were married in such a harum-scarum fashion that I had no time to attend to a great many business matters that will wait no longer. But I will try to return at the end of a week, or a fortnight at latest, and in the meantime you can make up your mind whether you will live on here or have a little house near London."

"But what matters it where I live, provided you are with me?" asks the young wife, in dismay. "All places are the same to me if you are there; and without you I cannot live."

"My dear Eugenie, I wish you would try to be sensible for a few minutes," he retorts, sharply. "Other women have to live without their husbands being constantly with them, and you will have to do the same. We have spent a most delightful honeymoon, but now that is over and the practical view of life begins. I will spend as much time with you as I can, and if you are living near London I shall be able to be with you more than if I have this long journey before me. But there will be times when weeks and even months may elapse without your seeing me, so you may as well make up your mind to the inevitable."

He means to be kind; he would not wantonly give her pain; but every word that he speaks falls upon her lacerated heart like molten lead. Their honeymoon is over, indeed! And in her first despair at awakening from her dream of bliss she wishes that her life might end with it.

But she gives no verbal expression to her grief. Like a statue of despair she sits, until he has finished; then she says, quietly :

"In that case we had better live near London."

And he replies, carelessly :

"Very well, I will see about it. And now, don't cry

your eyes out while I am away; I never could endure a trearful woman."

She smiles mechanically. A hand of ice seems to grip her heart, so that she could shriek aloud with agony, but she controls her emotion with a self-command which few who knew her would give her credit for possessing; she drives back the tears from her eyes, and though her cheeks are pale, and her lips are ashy in their hue, her eyes are bright, and she seems calm and resigned to her husband leaving her.

Poor Eugenie! her awakening has only just begun, and the day may not be far distant when she will bitterly regret that she escaped from her brother and Di Castro to become the wife of this cold-blooded Englishman!

CHAPTER XII.

HINDFLEET HALL, on the afternoon of the same day as that upon which Lord Claude Irongate took to Hetty Hamblin his peace-offering.

Lady Edward Tavenner is seated in a large chair near one of the five windows in the drawing-room; her hands are busy with a pair of knitting-needles, which go on knitting monotonously, seemingly without thought or attention from the person who holds them.

For Lady Edward is always working for the poor people of the parish, few of whom appreciate her labors; but though her hands are busy, her eyes are fixed upon her son, who is lounging in a low chair at some distance from her, with an open book in his hand, from which he is reading.

But after awhile his eyes wander from the page before him to the window, through which he can see the gardens, the well-wooded park, and Brent Wood in the far distance.

As he thus gazes, his thoughts must be pleasant ones, for his face softens, his eyes grow liquid with tender feelings,

and a half smile parts his lips, as though he were in imagination wafting a kiss to one who is not present.

His is the face of a man in love, of a man who is in love for the first time; of one, upon whose heart the passion comes like some Heaven-sent gift, giving a rarer tinting to the flowers, a brighter beauty to the skies, throwing a charm and a glamor upon every object in nature, awakening in his own heart undreamed of melodies, stirring into life new hopes, new fears, new aspirations; lifting his soul nearer to Him who is the source of all love.

He has forgotten that he is not alone; he is dreaming a dream that comes to a man but once in a life-time, and a deep sigh of mingled pain and bliss escapes him, just before his mother asks, abruptly:

"Are you going to Colnehurst to-day, Gilbert?"

"No, mother," he replies, briefly, and turns to the perusal of his book, with another sigh, as though the dream in which he was indulging could not be recalled.

"You didn't go yesterday, did you?" persists Lady Edward, ignoring the fact that her son does not seem inclined to talk.

Again he answers in the negative; then he adds, as though he would change the subject:

"At this hour yesterday I was up a tree, with a furious bull lying in wait for me below."

"Yes; that was a terrible thing," returns his mother, with a shudder. "That is one of the disadvantages of living in this country. People talk of the perils of Indian life, but for my part I would as soon meet a rogue elephant as an infuriated bull — neither of them could do more than kill you."

"No; but the elephant might have pulled up the tree yesterday," replies Gilbert, carelessly. "And if he had not done that, he could soon have pulled us down with his trunk."

"Us!" repeats his mother, catching him up, quickly.

"Did I say us?" he asks, flushing with vexation at his own oversight.

"You did," is the emphatic reply.

"Then I must have been thinking of something else," he retorts, impatiently.

His mother's manner of questioning lately has irritated him greatly, and he feels that the time will soon come when he will have to make a stand against it.

Lady Edward is conscious of this, and she shifts her ground; and though far from satisfied, she returns to a subject in which she is most greatly interested, and after the lapse of a few minutes, she asks:

"Won't Lady Daphne wonder at your absence?"

"I don't know, neither do I care," is the reply which startles her to the extent of making her repeat incredulously:

"You don't care?"

"No, not in the least," he answers, with a yawn; "I am tired of her whims and fancies, her uncertain temper, and her jealousies. When I left Colnehurst the other day I more than half resolved never to enter it again."

"But, my dear Gilbert, you are engaged to marry her!" expostulates his mother, in sudden dismay.

"Yes, thanks to you, mother, I have been led into a pretty trap there!" retorts Gilbert, with unusual temper. "Why you should want to marry me to a woman older than myself, and possessed of such a vile temper, I cannot understand," he continues, bitterly. "For my own part I am in no hurry to marry, and I have written to my grandfather, to ask if he will get me a diplomatic appointment abroad. I am tired of the aimless life I now lead."

"You have written to your grandfather, the duke, and have made such a request without consulting me?" exclaims her ladyship, all in a flutter, like an anxious hen when her ducklings take to the water.

"Yes," replies Gilbert, placidly, "there was no need for

consultation, because I had made up my mind on the subject. You seem to forget, mother, that I came of age two years ago, and that I now ought to think and act for myself."

"You take good care that I shall not forget it," retorts Lady Edward, passionately, "but since you have ceased to have any regard for my feelings, I shall likewise cease to trouble myself about you or your movements."

And with an air of offended dignity she picks up her wool and her knitting needles, and slowly walks toward the door, every moment expecting her son to come to her side, as he has always come hitherto, and coax her to remain and entreat her forgiveness.

But this time Gilbert does not rise, does not utter a word to detain her, and when she reaches the door, she turns and looks back, scarcely able to believe that her influence over her only son is one whit less than it hitherto has been.

He, however, is gazing through the window, the dreamy smile softening his face with a tenderness that has hitherto been principally for his mother, and she, with the instinct of love, becomes conscious that she has a powerful rival in his heart.

"You are ambitious, like your father," she mutters, bitterly, and she is passing through the doorway when a footman appears, with a small, flat parcel in his hand.

"What is it, Sims?" she asks, curiously.

"A picture for the master, my lady," is the answer.

Then the man approaches Gilbert Tavenner, and says:

"Joe Hamblin brought this himself, sir."

"Ah! tell him to wait," is the reply.

Then, with unnecessary eagerness, Tavenner unfolds the small oil painting upon which Hetty Hamblin has worked so industriously.

"What is it?" asks Lady Edward, taking this slight opportunity of forgetting her resentment."

"The portrait of old Nestor."

Then, observing that his mother shows no sign of leaving him to look at the portrait of the horse alone, he places it carefully upon a cabinet, in such a position that the light falls well upon it, and, muttering something about paying the man, he walks out of the room.

When he returns his mother is still looking at the painting, and a slight expression of annoyance comes over Gilbert's face as she asks:

"Who is H. H.?"

"I don't understand you," he replies. Then, perceiving the initials in the corner of the picture, he says, with seeming indifference:

"H. H.; oh, yes. Hetty Hamblin."

"And who is Hetty Hamblin?" demands his mother, in her most categorical tone.

"She is the artist who painted this," he answers.

"So I presume," is the haughty response; "but who is the woman when she is at home?"

"She is the daughter of Lord Claude's trainer," replies her son, with growing restlessness.

"And is she pretty?" pursues her ladyship.

"Yes, more than pretty," he returned, steadily.

"Ah, I thought as much!" cries Lady Edward, in a sharp, angry tone. "It was the girl's beauty, not her talent, that induced you to order this daub, for it is nothing but a daub. Look at those legs; did you ever see a horse with legs like those?"

"Yes, in my opinion the legs are remarkably well drawn," replies Gilbert, with a smile. "At any rate," he adds, as his mother tosses her head with contempt, "I am satisfied with the performance, which I think a very creditable one for a girl of sixteen."

"Sixteen!" repeats his mother, slowly; then to herself she mutters, "that is why he calls Lady Daphne old — he will be calling her plain next."

But she feels that the matter is one in which she can take

no step at present, and, suddenly remembering the resentment regarding her son's letter to his grandfather, she makes another slighting remark about the picture and with stately steps sweeps out of the room.

In her day Lady Edward Tavenner was a very handsome woman ; she retains the wreck of her lost beauty now.

Her hair is silvery in its whiteness, and clusters in tiny curls round her forehead ; her eyes, once noted for their brightness, have grown dull ; but she has a fresh complexion, and, being thoroughly well-dressed, she still appears a good-looking woman.

She was nearer forty than thirty when she married Lord Edward Tavenner, the fifth son of the Duke of Sandhaven.

At that time there was no prospect that her husband or his offspring would succeed to the dukedom, but death has claimed one after another of those who stood in their way ; the duke has lost his sons and his grandsons, she has lost her husband, and of all this large family only her son Gilbert remains.

But the old duke is tough and wiry ; he is eighty now, he may live to be a hundred. His likes and dislikes are more strongly pronounced than in a younger man, and though he can tolerate his grandson, who is likewise his heir, he has a most unconquerable aversion to his grandson's mother.

Thus it happens that Lady Edward is never invited to Black Tor Castle, and that she has by way of retaliation always kept her son away from the influence of his grandfather as much as possible.

She was the more easily able to do this because she has a large fortune of her own. Her husband had possessed Hindfleet, and the adjoining estate of Brentwood ; and, though both of these have descended to her son, they have made her and him practically independent of her father-in-law.

So Lady Edward has been accustomed to "kick up her

heels," as the old duke terms it, to rule, by combined temper and affection, both her husband and her son. But her husband has gone over to the majority, and her son is now, for the first time, rebelling against her authority.

How hard it is for this masterful woman to find her son acting and thinking for himself, it is needless to say.

There are wise parents who teach their offspring self-reliance, and who are as careful that they shall think and act wisely for themselves as that they shall walk well and avoid the spiritual dangers that surround us every day of our lives.

But Lady Edward Tavenner is not one of this order; independence on the part of her son means rebellion against her authority, and it was partly to avoid anything of this kind that she had arranged the engagement between Gilbert and Lady Daphne Irongate.

Lady Daphne is one of Lady Edward Tavenner's favorites. She has always submitted to her superior judgment, and the fact of her being a little older than Gilbert has been rather an advantage than otherwise in Lady Edward's eyes.

"She will lead him," had been her mental comment, forgetful of the fact that there are men who do not care to be led.

She is sitting at the window of her boudoir, bitterly reflecting upon her son's self-assertion, and upon his application to his grandfather to get him appointed as unpaid *attaché* to some foreign court, when, in the road of which this window commands a view, she perceives an open carriage, drawn by a pair of horses, coming toward the hall.

For a few minutes she watches this carriage doubtfully; then, as she recognizes its occupant, she mutters disdainfully:

"If the mountain won't come to Mahomet, Mahomet must come to the mountain, I see. She is wiser than I expected. The prospect of becoming a duchess outweighs all other considerations, but I hope she will be gentle and

amiable ; Gilbert is in no mood to stand temper or dictation to day."

So she muses, while Lady Daphne Irongate, seated alone in the large carriage, is rapidly brought nearer to Hindfleet Hall.

If Lady Edward Tavenner could read what is passing through the mind of the woman whom she has selected for a daughter-in-law, she would go down to the carriage to meet her and take her direct to her own room.

But she does not; she thinks it may be just as well for Gilbert and Lady Daphne to meet, and get their little differences settled before she appears upon the scene ; and, therefore, when a servant comes to announce that Lady Daphne Irongate is in the drawing-room, she asks, carelessly:

"Is Mr. Gilbert with her ?"

And being answered in the affirmative, she says, quietly :

"I will be down directly," and goes on with her knitting.

Ten minutes elapse, a quarter of an hour ; then Lady Edward rises slowly and walks with deliberate steps toward the long drawing-room in which she had left her son.

The sound of angry voices falls upon her ear as she opens the door, and she hears Lady Daphne ask, in high-pitched treble notes :

"Then you refuse to promise never to speak to that artful girl again ?"

"Of course I do," is Gilbert's indignant reply ; "I shall speak to her whenever I have the chance. I admire her more than anybody else in the whole world!"

"This to me!" cries Lady Daphne, her face white, her every limb trembling with rage.

"You hear him!" she screams, passionately, turning to Lady Edward ; "you hear him tell me that he admires that vile girl who has come between us, the girl who has bewitched my brother, and who paints those wretched daubs that he sits adoring ; but I will spoil that for him, at any rate!"

And before a hand can be lifted to restrain her, she has

caught up an ornamented dagger, intended for a paper knife, that was on a table by her side, and has dashed it through the canvas upon which the portrait of Nestor had been painted.

An awful silence succeeds this outburst of insane wrath.

Gilbert Tavenner utters never a word; Lady Edward looks at the pale, stern face of her son, then at the plain, distorted features of Lady Daphne, and she closes her own lips tightly.

No woman can disprove more strongly of such a senseless outburst of spite than she does, and she knows her son too well to believe that any words of hers will induce him now to be coerced by it.

But it is Lady Daphne Irongate who finds this silence the most dreadful.

To begin with, she is frightened at what she has done. Next, when she looks with a last remnant of defiance upon Gilbert's handsome face, she sees that it is hard and cold, and when, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, she lifts up her hands in entreaty and begins to appeal to his love and his forgiveness, he takes the slashed and ruined painting in his hand, and without one word of reproach, of anger, or of adieu, he slowly and steadily leaves the room.

"Stop, stop! Forgive me!" pleads Lady Daphne, who is now beside herself with remorse and grief.

But he pays no heed to her, and his mother's words fall upon her ear like a death-knell, as she says:

"He will never forgive you, Daphne; I would not if I were he. A woman who has no control over her own passions is no fitting wife for a son of mine."

CHAPTER XIII.

In a very unenviable frame of mind Lady Daphne Irongate returns to Colnehurst Castle.

Like most ill-tempered people, she thinks of the wrong — real or imaginary — done to herself, and counts as nothing the pain and mortification she has inflicted upon others.

Certainly no one is so miserable in consequence of Lady Daphne's ill-temper as she is herself.

As yet she does not realize that her engagement with Gilbert Tavenner is at an end, that her prospect of one day becoming Duchess of Sandhaven is blotted out.

This awakening will come later on, when she has had time to cool and to reckon up the consequences of her folly.

At present she is thinking more of Hetty Hamblin than of any one else, and if malignant wishes could destroy any human being our poor heroine would stand a very poor chance of seeing another sunrise.

It had come to Lady Daphne's ears on this eventful day that Gilbert Tavenner had not been alone in his peril the previous afternoon; that there had been a girl with him in the branches of the tree, while the bull was waiting for him below; and though only the most ill-disposed person could see anything to give cause for jealousy in this fact, Lady Daphne at once came to the conclusion that he had been walking by the river side with this girl, and her jealous heart with unerring certainty at once decided that Hetty Hamblin was Gilbert's companion.

Several things helped her to this conclusion. She remembered that when she went to Stanmoor the previous afternoon with the intention of seeing Hetty, Mrs. Hamblin said that her daughter had gone to Colneford, and on her own return to the castle she found that Mr. Tavenner had

not called as usual; and if he had not been near the town to which Hetty had been sent, he could not have encountered the bull nor have been in any danger from it.

This circumstance alone — annoying though it was — might not have excited Lady Daphne if she had not had Hetty Hamblin on the brain for the last eight-and-forty hours.

Last evening, when Lord Claude returned home, and she began to abuse the trainer's wife, and to speak in disdainful terms of his daughter, repeating her request that Joe Hamblin should be dismissed from her brother's service, the latter laughed at her openly, said that Joe was too useful and his daughter too pretty to be sent away; and hinted broadly that he was sufficiently interested in the girl himself to make her at rest about Tavenner.

But Lord Claude has kindled the fires of jealousy in his sister's heart, and no words of his have power to extinguish them.

No, not even when she sees him, followed by a groom carrying a bouquet, and riding in the direction of Stanmoor, is she satisfied that Tavenner is in no danger from Hetty's wiles.

On the contrary, she is all the more irritated because her brother is behaving so insanely, and she wonders what she can do to put a stop to this folly.

But it was not until after luncheon, when she expected Gilbert, that she heard about his having a companion in the branches of the tree the previous afternoon, and, unfortunately for herself, Lord Claude was not at home at the time to laugh her out of her jealous mood.

So she had ordered the carriage, had ridden to Hindfleet Hall alone, as we have seen with the result already described, and now she is returning home, her heart filled with sullen wrath against Gilbert Tavenner and his mother, as well as against Lord Claude and poor, unoffending Hetty.

For the time being, however, she is beaten. Mrs. Ham-

blin has defied her; her brother laughs at her, and declines to be influenced by her in any way; Gilbert Tavenner has left her presence in silent resentment, and even his mother, who has been her staunchest friend throughout, has condemned her.

Under these circumstances there is nothing for Lady Daphne to do but to return home, seek her own room, and indulge in violent hysterics, greatly to the distress of her aunt and the annoyance of her maid, to say nothing of her own mental and physical exhaustion, which becomes so great that for a whole week she is confined to her own room, and the family doctor is in daily attendance upon her.

When she returns to the world, the world has changed, in so far as she is concerned.

To begin with, Gilbert Tavenner has gone away from Hindfleet Hall to spend a few weeks with his grandfather, and from Black Tor Castle he will start to join the British Legation in Bulgaria.

Moreover, he has left home without a word, either by letter or messenger, to the woman to whom he was engaged, and all of his friends know of his movements before the news, in a casual manner, reaches Lady Daphne.

This is the first blow, but she is in a measure prepared for it. During those weary days which she has spent in the seclusion of her own apartments, the bitter truth has forced itself upon her heart that Gilbert Tavenner has made up his mind not to marry her.

That she has herself to thank for this decision is no consolation to her; it is not the first time in her life that her jealous temper has marred her own happiness; and now, as heretofore, she blames the object of her jealousy instead of herself, for the mortification that has fallen upon her.

But this is not all; her brother, Lord Claude, is likewise giving her anxiety.

Servants are always quick to catch hold of anything con-

nected with one of their own class, and Lord Claude's attentions to Hetty Hamblin, the trainer's daughter, have already been freely commented upon.

The head-gardener privately expresses his indignation at his choicest flowers being cut every morning to send to Stanmoor, to a girl who is far from being so well off as his own daughter; the groom who carries the bouquet has likewise his grievance; the women servants — who are scandalized by this marked attention to a girl who, like her mother, has always kept aloof from them — do not fail to express their opinions; and these murmurs reach Lady Daphne through her maid, and alarm her as to the stability of her position in her brother's house.

For Lady Daphne reads these signs aright; she understands that they mean matrimony.

She judges pretty correctly that her brother Claude is no saint, but he has always been very careful to avoid scandal, and if he has indulged in any gallantries it has been far away from his own home.

So scrupulous has he been on this point that his sister understands at once the end to which all these marked attentions are tending, and, instead of being glad, mentally anathematizes Hetty for her supposed presumption in desiring to become the mistress of Colnehurst Castle.

It is on the tenth day after that unfortunate visit of hers to Hindfleet Hall that Lady Daphne and her aunt are driving in an open carriage through the shady lanes of Colneshire.

Plainer than ever is Lady Daphne; the frown on her brow has deepened, her complexion is dull and leaden in hue, her pale blue eyes look as though half of the color had been washed out of them, and her light brown hair is destitute alike of gloss or curl.

She is aged, too—she looks a woman of thirty, and her dress is as unbecoming as the dress of a fashionable lady can be.

Her aunt and she have been driving in silence for a couple of hours; she does not feel sufficiently amiable to make any calls, and Mrs. Beevor, oppressed by the heat of the day, and lulled by the motion of the carriage, has fallen into a comfortable doze, from which she is suddenly awakened by Lady Daphne stopping the coachman, and demanding sternly:

"Who is that girl?"

"Who — where?" asks Mrs. Beevor, still only half awake.

Her niece pays no heed to her; her eyes are fixed upon a group at a little distance, and her aunt, following her gaze, perceives Lord Claude mounted on one of his saddle-horses, and accompanied by a man with a horsey appearance — who does not seem to be either a groom or a gentleman — and a girl, likewise mounted, whose beautiful face and graceful figure would attract attention anywhere.

"That is Joe Hamblin and his daughter, my lady!" is the reply which the man makes, without moving a muscle of his face.

"Drive nearer to them; I want to see her," is the order; and the coachman obediently turns his horses, and drives in a direction which will necessitate his passing the party on horseback.

Lord Claude has observed the movement; he knows his sister's temper well; he guesses that she means to make mischief, if possible, and, with a word of excuse to his companions, he rides forward alone to meet the carriage.

The coachman pulls up as his master lifts his hand, and his lordship rides to the side of his sister, and, bending forward, he asks, in a low tone, so that the servants shall not overhear him:

"Why did you turn this way, Daphne?"

"I wanted to have a good look at that girl," is the defiant reply.

"Very well, I will introduce you if you will promise to be

friendly and kind to her," he says, in a tone the quiet determination of which frightens her, though she is sufficiently enraged to say, disdainfully:

"Friendly with the daughter of a servant!"

"No; friendly with my future wife!" he replies, distinctly and in a tone loud enough for the footman and coachman to hear him.

"Claude, you are mad!" cries his sister, passionately.

"Not half so mad as you are!" he replies, with hard-set mouth, piercing eyes, and an expression on his handsome countenance that makes her quail.

Then, as she does not retort, he says, steadily:

"If you will not be kind and friendly to Hetty, oblige me by going some other way. You will drive me to extreme measures if you insult her."

"As if I could insult such a creature!" exclaims Lady Daphne, her temper again getting the better of her discretion. "I will not drive any other way; let her avoid me if she likes! Go on!" she adds, imperiously, turning to the coachman.

But the latter looks to his master for orders, and when Lord Claude says, authoritatively, "Turn round and drive home!" he touches his hat and obeys, despite Lady Daphne's angry protest and her passionate assertion that he shall never drive her again.

When she reaches home her ladyship indulges in another fit of hysterics; but this does not last long, for her aunt soon leaves her to the care of her maid, and the latter shows so little concern for her condition that she suddenly pulls herself together and becomes as calm and silent as she had recently been excited and loud.

A judge of human nature would perceive that this change bodes no good for the object of her hatred; it is the silent river that closes its deep waters over its helpless victim, not the babbling brook, that runs so noisily upon its way.

Hitherto, Lady Daphne's angry passions have only injured herself; henceforth she will make them a scourge to others.

This evening Lady Daphne keeps her own room, and her brother does not see her on his return home; but the next morning she appears at breakfast as usual, and no one, to judge by her manner, would suppose that she had lost the chance of becoming a duchess, and that her tenure as mistress of her brother's house was rapidly coming to an end.

After the little exhibition of temper yesterday, Lord Claude is surprised to find her so calm and sensible; but he is wise enough to make no comment upon the change, though, when the meal is over, and he can speak with her quietly and alone, he asks:

"Is it all off between you and Tavenner, Daphne?"

"I don't know," she replies, gloomily.

"I ask because he went away without calling to see either of us," he continues; "and I heard that you went over to Hindfleet Hall the day before you were laid up. I suppose the truth is, you and Gilbert had a row?"

"You may call it so if you like," she replies, coldly; "we certainly disagreed, though nothing was said about breaking off the engagement."

"Well, what did happen, or what was said?" her brother demands, impatiently. "I have a right to know," he continues. "I am waiting for you to get married, before taking a similar step myself."

"If you wait for that, I am afraid you will have to wait a long time," she replies, scornfully. "Gilbert left me in silence the last time we were together. I have heard that he intends to go to Bulgaria when he leaves his grandfather; but he has not condescended to inform me of the fact."

"Would you like me to write and ask him the meaning of his conduct?" asks Lord Claude. "Or rather," he continues, seeing his sister hesitate, "I will ask him for my own convenience when he means to marry you."

"You will not do this on my authority!" replies Lady

Daphne, haughtily. "I decline to be flung at the head of any man, and I am in no hurry to marry!"

So saying, she leaves the room, her head high in the air, for though she is anxious to hear from Gilbert Tavenner, she would not bend her pride sufficiently to say so.

But her brother mutters to himself, as the door closes behind her:

"If you are not in a hurry, I am. Hetty isn't like other girls. She hasn't accepted me yet, but when she does I must marry her without loss of time. In her case delays are dangerous. Young Lord Broadacre asked me her name the other day and wanted to be introduced; he admired her greatly, but I am first in the field, and her mother is on my side. Still, I am glad that Tavenner is out of the way; I have always felt that there was danger from that quarter."

Thus musing, he sits down to write to Gilbert Tavenner, and asks him, in the most straightforward manner possible, when he proposes to fulfill his engagement, and marry Lady Daphne.

The answer comes by return of post, and runs as follows:

"DEAR LORD CLAUDE: In answer to your question: 'Never!' I am now on my way to Bulgaria, where any letter directed to me at the British legation will certainly come to hand.

"Yours truly,

"GILBERT TAVENNER."

"No lack of decision about this," mutters Lord Claude, angrily, turning over the paper as he speaks; "but it's very shabby of him to back out of it in this fashion; and so Hetty will think, I have no doubt, when I show her the letter. Awfully mean! I shouldn't have thought it of him.

So he takes the letter to Stanmoor the same morning, and Lady Daphne does not know of its arrival, nor, indeed, that her brother had written to demand an answer.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CHANGE has come over Hetty Hamblin. She is not less beautiful than of old, but she is less buoyant, more subdued, as though the weight of an unaccustomed trouble rested heavily upon her heart.

Her father regards her anxiously; she is his pride, his joy, his one compensation for the great mistake he made in marrying a lady.

When we hear of a couple being unequally yoked together in matrimony our sympathies at once go out to the man or the woman who has descended to a lower level, but surely the feelings of the more humble individual are equally entitled to consideration, and the regret on one side is often found to be quite as great as on the other.

Poor Joe Hamblin in his secret soul has mourned over his marriage as much as his wife, but he has had the good sense to say little about it. He is proud of his children, proud that Chris is so like himself in his tastes and pursuits, but still more proud of his daughter's beauty and refinement.

That everybody who sees her should admire Hetty seems to him quite a natural thing, and therefore he is not very greatly surprised when his wife tells him that his master, Lord Claude Irongate, wishes to marry their daughter.

"I am glad of it," he says, slowly, and in a tone that belies his words. "She was born for a different life than we can give her, but we shall lose her. 'Twill never do for his lordship's father-in-law to be his trainer; we shall have to go away and seek our living elsewhere."

"I don't suppose there will be any necessity for that," returns his wife, coldly; "and, in any case, you need not be in a hurry. Hetty is still too young to marry, and Lord Claude must get his sister off his hands before he can bring home a wife."

"And how does Hetty take to it?" asks Joe, anxiously.

But his wife shrugs her shoulders, and replies, impatiently:

"She is fanciful, as all girls are."

Then, observing the expression of her husband's countenance, she adds, sharply:

"I hope you won't encourage her in her fancies. This will be her only chance of ever winning back for herself what I have lost; she is not fit to be a poor man's wife, and she will never be able to maintain herself."

"Still, I don't see why she need marry a man if she doesn't like him," expostulates Joe, sturdily. "There is Chris to take care of her if anything should happen to you and me."

"Chris!" she repeats, and the withering contempt conveyed in her voice baffles any powers of description.

Her husband cowers under it, as though she had lashed him with a whip; he would have borne it better had she done so, for her words sometimes wound him far more cruelly than could any instrument of torture.

Her words seem to imply that Chris belongs to a different order of beings to his sister; but Joe knows that his son is a good fellow in his way, and after a momentary pause he gathers courage to say:

"Chris is a better son than you deserve, missus; and I won't have Hetty made to marry a man she don't like; so you've heard my words."

And he walks away quickly, fearful lest he may be tempted to say more than he desires.

But after this he watches his daughter narrowly. He sees her droop like a lily overpowered by the too fervid sun; he notices that she never greets Lord Claude with the glad eagerness natural to a girl who is in love—that she shrinks from him whenever he approaches her closely; and that, without being rude or repulsive, she invariably withdraws her hand from his clasp as soon as possible, while she dislikes even to walk in the garden with him alone.

All this her father observes, with an eye made searching by his paternal love; and he notes, too, how his daughter seems to lose heart, how her vitality forsakes her, and how limp and listlesss she gradually becomes.

"She is getting like my sister Carrie, who died in a decline," he cries out one day to his wife, in sudden alarm, "I see it in her face and in her ways. See how thin she is getting, how pale her cheeks are, when they used to be as bright as the rosy side of a peach. She must have a change. You had better pack up to-morrow, and take her to the seaside; I'll find the money, and if I run short Chris isn't the lad to snap his purse at his father. You may go where you like, but you must go to the seaside. And mark me, wife, for the first week Lord Claude mustn't join you."

"Very well," replies Mrs. Hamblin, indifferently.

She is not displeased at the prospect of a change, but she is vexed at the tone which her husband has adopted, and still more vexed with her daughter for showing so unmistakably how completely she has been coerced into a tacit acceptance of Lord Claude as a possible husband.

While she is thus thinking she looks out of the window, and perceives her daughter seated under the shade of the great cedar, her easel standing near her, but neglected, while she leans back in a low chair, with a book in her hand, but resting listlessly upon her lap, it being but too evident that she is not reading.

"What can be the matter with the girl?" exclaims Mrs. Hamblin, impatiently. "She isn't a bit like her usual self; she seems to have lost all life and spirit since Lord Claude has made manifest his intentions. If there were anybody with whom she could be in love, I should say that was the cause, but there isn't; and yet nothing seems to rouse her. But Joe is wrong — her ailment is mental, not physical; a change may do her good, but I am not afraid of her lungs, they are sound enough."

At this point in her reflections she observes that Lord

Claude Irongate approaches Hetty, takes her hand, and would kiss her if she did not draw back in a manner which effectually repulses the attempt.

But he seats himself by her side, and begins to talk.

"You are not looking well to-day," observes his lordship, with solicitude.

"There is nothing the matter with me, thank you," replies Hetty, indifferently; "the heat is great, and I get tired of everything, but I am not ill."

"No, but you want a change," he says, decisively; "so do I, and the change I propose is that we get married at once and go on the Continent; or, if you prefer it, we will go to Norway—we shall get cool weather there."

"Oh, no; my mother told me that your sister would first marry," replies Hetty, nervously and looking wistfully at the shining river, a gleam of which she catches through the trees. "She told me that Lady Daphne would get married before you would think of anything of the kind."

"But there is no chance of Lady Daphne marrying," he retorts, impatiently; "it is all broken off between her and Tavenner."

"Broken off!" repeats Hetty, ignoring that part of his grievance which troubles him most.

"Yes, broken off," he replies, gloomily. "I suppose she has been showing off her temper to Tavenner, and he wouldn't stand it any longer. I wrote to ask him when the marriage was coming off, and this is the answer."

He hands Gilbert Tavenner's letter to Hetty, and she reads it with breathless interest.

The words are decisive enough. In answer to the question when he means to marry Lady Daphne, the reply is "Never!"

And Hetty, reading the word, feels her heart bound like a bird fluttering against the bars of its cage, with a sudden hope of coming freedom; a film seems to gather before her eyes, to make everything indistinct and blurred; and when

his lordship speaks, her tongue for the moment is tied, and she hands him back the letter in silence.

"Don't you think it was awfully shabby of him to cry off in this fashion, just as his fulfilling his engagement was most important to me?"

"I suppose he had good reason for what he did," Hetty nerves herself to say, steadily.

"I might have known you would take his part; women always do side with men against each other."

"Am I taking his part?" asks Hetty, a bright color coming into her cheeks.

"It pays to make you angry, Hetty; you look a different girl when you are excited. I must have a kiss; come now, don't be so coy, nobody is looking, and if anybody were, why should we care?"

But Hetty throws back her head in sudden alarm, and answers, coldly:

"I don't like kissing," she replies, evasively; "and I hate to be touched," she adds, retreating from him as he tries to clasp his arm round her slender waist.

"You are the only girl of my acquaintance who does dislike it," he says, in a tone of annoyance; "and I half believe that you only say it now to provoke me. You seem to forget that I have a right to kiss and embrace you when I desire to do so."

"Indeed, my lord, you have no such right!" asserts Hetty, with more spirit than she has hitherto shown. "I have not given you the right, and nobody else could do so."

"Ah, I see! you think I am too ardent in my wooing," he returns with an uneasy laugh; "and, perhaps, you are right. I have been rather spoilt by your fair sex; however, I will try to have patience while your frozen heart thaws, and in the meantime you might consider my proposition that we should get married and go abroad until some arrangement is made with regard to the residence of my sister, Lady Daphne."

"That proposition requires no consideration, my lord," replies Hetty, firmly. "I would not be married in a hurry, and I would not willingly go abroad for any length of time."

"Well, then, what is to be done?" he asks, contracting his brows.

"I don't see the necessity for doing anything at present," she replies, evasively.

Then, as he begins to protest that he cannot and will not wait, she says, emphatically:

"My mother has promised me that I shall not marry before I am eighteen unless I wish it, and I am not seventeen yet; therefore, there is more than a year before me."

She does not add that it was in consequence of this promise that she likewise bound herself not to refuse Lord Claude in the interval, though nothing could induce her to promise to accept him.

"In that case I suppose I must wait," he says, ruefully; "and meanwhile I must find some means of getting Daphne off my hands. An unmarried sister is a great bore," he continues, thoughtfully, "particularly when she is blessed with such a temper as mine has."

To this Hetty makes no reply.

Hetty has never spoken to Lady Daphne, but she has understood from her mother that Lord Claude's sister is very bitter against herself, and she could see from her ladyship's countenance yesterday that she was prepared to be very haughty and disagreeable when they met.

If she loved Lord Claude, this would probably trouble her, but she does not love him, she is not sure even that she likes him, and if her mother had not coerced her, partly through her affections, partly by her authority, she would have positively and definitely refused him.

But Mrs. Hamblin knows how the constant dropping of water will wear away a stone, and in like manner, there being no rival in the field, she feels very sure that with

patience and perseverance, Lord Claude may win her daughter to become his wife.

Whether or not her calculations are right time alone can show, but, whatever may be his lordship's opinion on the matter, she is very well satisfied with the progress he has made.

Even Hetty's cold manner, and her refusal to allow him a lover's privilege of kissing her, is an additional attraction to a man who has, as he himself confesses, been rather spoiled by women, and the observant mother sees this, and is pleased that it should be so.

She has been watching them all this time through the window, thinking what a handsome couple they make, amused to see their animated faces, but too far distant to hear their words.

Somebody else watches them also.

In a clump of bushes, on a slightly elevated piece of ground, a man is jealously regarding the lovers who are under the tall cedar.

He likewise is too distant to hear their voices ; he could not even see them well if he were not provided with an old pair of race-glasses, which he keeps before his eyes, and thus, with his hands, more than half covers his own face.

Judging from his low, muttered words the scene upon which he looks does not meet with his approbation, and a coarse oath escapes his lips as the couple rise from their seats, as though meaning to take a stroll, and Lord Claude, with an assumption of proprietorship, links his arm in Hetty's and leads her slowly toward the river.

The fact of a man taking a girl's arm always makes a passer-by look steadily at the couple. It seems to imply so much — that she belongs to him, that he is proud to show all the world his choice, and to lean upon her, as she in years to come shall lean upon him.

Mrs. Hamblin observes the action and smiles with satisfaction. Hetty shrinks for a moment from the clasp, then

submits. She feels that to resent it or to make any fuss would be prudish in the extreme; and the man, half hidden in the bushes, growls and follows the pair at a good distance.

Well it is for both of them that his harmless race-glass is not a loaded gun, for, in his present frame of mind, he would be quite sure to give them the benefit of its contents.

Lord Claude and Hetty walk slowly down to the river; they are talking about pictures.

His lordship is telling the girl that he paints a little himself, and he says he will come down the next day and work with her and set up an easel of his own.

Hetty is not altogether pleased with this suggestion; she fears that she will have much more of his company than she desires, but she cannot say so, and she consoles herself with the reflection that a fashionable man like Lord Claude, courted as he is wherever he goes, will soon get tired of painting in the company of a girl who does not show too much pleasure in having him frequently with her.

Presently Lord Claude looks at his watch, then exclaims in a tone of vexation:

"By Jove! how late it is, and I have some men coming to luncheon with me. I ought to have been at home half-an-hour ago; will you excuse me, darling? I can make a short cut to the stables from here, and shall just get home in time to keep my friends from thinking themselves slighted."

"Yes; don't wait a minute on my account," says Hetty, promptly.

"One kiss?" he begs, bending toward her fair face.

But she shakes her head, retreats a step, then offers him her hand.

"You pretty prude!" he exclaims, in a tone of vexation.

Then he kisses her hand, lifts his hat, and hastens away, leaving her standing by the river's brink alone.

"At last!" she exclaims, in a tone of relief and clasping

her hands tightly. "I thought he would never go, and I want to think."

She walks along slowly, her hands still clasped, her head drooping, her mind deep in thought, her breast heaving with emotion, and at length the words escape her lips:

"He said, 'Never, never!'"

"Who said never?" demands a voice at her side.

In surprise she looks up, and meets the burning eyes of Jem Blake fixed greedily upon her face.

"What are you doing here?" she asks, coldly and with unconscious hauteur.

"I'm here to speak with you," he replies, doggedly. "I told you the time would come when you should listen to me, and it's come now!"

CHAPTER XV.

HETTY looks at Jem Blake with surprise, not unmixed with anger.

She had been greatly terrified at the appearance of an infuriated bull in the same field as herself, but she is not frightened by this man, who is far more dangerous than the bull; and she says haughtily and in a tone of displeasure:

"You forget yourself and don't go the way to make me listen to you with patience."

"You'll have to listen to me, anyway," he returns, doggedly; "you've put me off long enough while you've carried on with my lord, and I'll stand it no longer. I'm a desperate man."

An unusual frown contracts Hetty's fair brow.

The man's tone is threatening and insulting. She observes that he is unusually excited, and as he comes close to her, and his hot breath fans her face, she recoils a step or two

"Hold fast!" cries Tavenner, clasping his arm round the girl's waist.

with an expression of disgust at the smell of the spirit he has been drinking.

He observes the action and plants himself before her in such a position that to advance she must come close to him — to retreat she must step back into the river.

Hetty understands by this time that she has no option but to listen to what her importunate and unwelcome admirer has to say to her, while she looks round eagerly, hoping that her father, or mother, or brother will come in sight and thus relieve her of Jem Blake's presence.

But she does not give expression to this hope, and her mind is too full of other thoughts for her to feel a suspicion that she can suffer anything more than annoyance from her present companion.

"Well, what have you to say to me that will not admit of delay?" she asks, quietly.

The man's face changes; the coldness of the beautiful eyes that so calmly meet his own strikes a chill into his heart.

Seeing Hetty so calm, however, he tries to control himself; his manner becomes a trifle less threatening, and he says, in a more humble tone:

"My uncle died a few months ago in America, and he's left me five hundred pounds."

"So I have heard," replies Hetty, indifferently.

She might add that she has likewise heard with pain that Jem is rapidly drinking himself to death on the strength of the legacy, but she instinctively feels that this is no time for commiseration or reproof, so she listens patiently while he continues:

"Of course, everybody has heard it," he assents, complacently, "and now I can afford it I mean to get married. Now you know what I'm driving at, I s'pose?"

"How should I know what you are driving at? But be quick, please; I want to get home, or my mother will come to look for me."

"And you think that will frighten me, my pretty one, do you?" he asks, with a half-drunken laugh. "Not a bit of it; but I'll get to the end of my story in a hurry. I want to get married, and I mean to marry you."

"It is very kind of you to want to share your money with me," replies Hetty, in the same freezing tone, "but I cannot accept it, and you must know that my mother has very different views for me, to say nothing of my own feelings."

"No, you don't seem to say much about your own feelings," he retorts, tauntingly, "though you show pretty plainly that you're not too much in love with my Lord Claude."

The swift blood dyes Hetty's cheeks a brighter red at this home thrust, but she retorts, with spirit:

"If I am not in love with Lord Claude I certainly am not in love with you, so we will end this fruitless discussion. I am sorry to vex you," she adds, observing the evil scowl that comes over his face, "but you must always have known that what you propose is impossible."

"And why should I have known it?" he asks, insolently. "How much better are you than me, I'd like to know?"

She makes no answer, but bites her lips, resolved not to bandy words with him.

"And what's your father, I'd like to know?" he continues, in voice and manner that are now positively abusive. "He started as a stable-helper, like I did, and he ain't so much better off than me now, and he'd be worse off if my lord hadn't taken a fancy to your pretty face. But Lord Claude don't mean to marry you; devil a bit of it. He makes believe that he does, to throw dust in your mother's eyes. But he's a gay young spark, is Lord Claude; he don't care what he says or what he spends to gratify his fancy. But he soon tires of his toys; he's done it before, to my knowledge, and he'd serve you in the same fashion if I hadn't made up my mind to have you myself."

The heightened color in Hetty's cheeks, the flash of

anger in her glorious eyes, show that her spirit is now thoroughly aroused, and she cries, indignantly:

"I will listen to no more of this; let me pass this instant!"

For he has planted himself in her way, and when she turns to the right or to the left he springs before her and bars the path.

"Not a bit of it," he replies, savagely. "You don't leave me now till you've sworn to marry me as soon as I've got a license ready. You'll swear it on this book," he continues, producing a small Testament from an inner pocket, "or you'll go into the river."

The river!

The words send a cold thrill through the girl's heart; she had forgotten the river, by the margin of which she had been walking when Jem Blake so suddenly came upon her; she turns quickly now, and finds that she is on the very edge of the path—that another step backward would have thrown her into the deep and sluggish stream.

As she realizes the nearness of the danger, the man's threats acquire additional significance.

She cannot swim, she has been warned again and again of the depth and danger of the stream in this part of the grounds, and she looks about in vain for help against this man, whose hand may in a moment consign her to a watery grave.

In this one brief moment thoughts pass through her mind with lightning speed.

Lord Claude Irongate's love for her, her love for Gilbert Tavenner, hitherto unconfessed and barely admitted by her own heart; the life which this man at her side offers to her, a condition of existence compared to which her mother's destiny was bliss indeed.

For her mother made her own choice; love—all-absorbing, passionate love—gilded the first months at any rate of her married life—and Love is such a potent power, that he can

make the cabin of a peasant far more to be desired than the palace of a king.

But there is no love here; none on the girl's part, at any rate.

On the contrary, there is repulsion, loathing amounting almost to detestation ; and Hetty, as she looks at the calm, shining river, then turns again and gazes at the man who has offered her the choice between becoming his wife or sinking at once into the cold arms of death, feels that, if driven to extremity, the fall into the deep water will be of the two the lesser evil.

"Will you swear ?" Jem asks, gloomily.

He has seen the sudden lighting up of her countenance, as her choice is mentally made, and in his inmost soul he feels that she is about to escape him.

For one brief second the temptation presents itself to her to take the oath he exacts, and afterward to defy him.

But she quickly scouts the idea as utterly unworthy to be entertained.

"You will be sorry for having spoken and acted like this when you are calmer, Jem ; it isn't like you to behave in this fashion."

"No, because I thought I'd win you by waiting," he replies, doggedly ; "but I find waiting is no good, and I'm not going to be put off any longer, so now you can make your choice. There's the river and here's the book, which is it to be ?"

But even as he speaks, she takes an unexpected spring and darts past him.

She cannot go in the direction she would like to take, leading either to the stables or the house; the only way open to her is to run along the path to a gate that is usually kept locked, but that leads into a lane by which pedestrians can walk from the high-road to the river.

It was through this gate she came on her way home that day when she escaped from the bull; for the public path

from the town along the river's side ends here, and tall palings fence off the lane from the grounds of Stanmoor.

There is a chance, and only a chance, that some person may be walking in the lane or by the river, just beyond these grounds, a man who will save her, or whose presence will deter Jem Blake from carrying out his murderous designs, and terror lends wings to her feet as she speeds over the ground, the scoundrel in hot pursuit after her.

She is the first to reach the gate, but it is locked ; her pursuer is close at her heels.

On the opposite bank of the river the ground just here rises steeply, and trees grow thickly to the water's edge.

The lane is rather steep likewise, the fence is out of repair, the whole place having been more or less neglected since it ceased to be the residence of a gentleman ; the consequence being that anybody who wishes to overlook this portion of the grounds can very easily do so.

If Hetty were not so close pressed by her pursuer, she could easily get out of the grounds, although the gate is locked ; but there is no time for this, she can only cling to the gate and shriek, "Help, help ! Murder, murder !" before Jem Blake is trying to tear her loose from her hold and drag her toward the river, which is only three or four yards distant.

"You'll not escape me like this," growls the brutal fellow, viciously ; "I'll swing for you if you don't wed me. I'll give you one more chance, and this is the last one ; will you swear the oath I bid you ?"

Her silent answer is to get a firmer hold upon the gate, and to raise her voice again in a piercing shriek that echoes through the still air, and startles the birds on the leafy trees.

"Confound you!" mutters the scoundrel, exerting all his strength to wrench her from her hold ; "stop that infernal row, or I'll dash your brains out!"

And as she is silent, dreading that he may keep his word, he asks again :

"Will you swear ?"

"No ; I will die first," she replies, desperately, turning to face him.

"Then die you shall," he retorts, with a fearful oath.

The next instant he has caught her in his arms and is carrying her toward the river.

Hetty gives herself up for lost ; her strength is exhausted.

That brief run, those loud cries, her frantic hold of the gate from whence she has been ruthlessly torn, have taken the power of further physical resistance from her.

She no longer struggles against her fate; she does not even cry out again.

Entreaties she feels to be useless, protests to be vain ; in this struggle against brute force she is vanquished, and she closes her eyes and breathes a silent prayer, every instant expecting the shock of the cold water, and the dreadful sensation of sinking into its depths.

The distance which Jem Blake has to carry her to the river's brink is only a few yards, but in these brief seconds, when life seems so near an end, and death so imminent, the events of the past few months crowd in upon her brain, and the unconfessed love in her heart throbs aloud for one glimpse, only one more glimpse, of the loved one before life and love shall cease and be no more.

Suddenly her hopes and fears come to a standstill.

She experiences a shock ; she is falling, she hears a loud splash as of a heavy body falling into the water, and she closes her eyes tightly, holds her breath and wonders and wonders — as one does wonder at any moment of great peril — what is the sensation of dying.

"Poor darling, she has fainted !" murmurs a voice above her.

And she opens her eyes, looks up suddenly, sees the face of Gilbert Tavenner bending over her, and, still under the

impression that she has been very near to death, that perhaps she has passed the dark portal, a glad radiance comes over her lovely face. She holds out her hands to him with a sweet expression of glad trustfulness in her eyes, and murmurs, dreamily:

"Then we are in heaven!"

"I wish we were, my dear," replies Gilbert Tavenner, in the flesh, and with an uneasy laugh. "We should not then have to consider the prejudices of parents or the opinions of the world. But who is that fellow from whom I have just rescued you?"

His first words rouse her. She is seated upon the grass where she has fallen; her feet are so near the river that if she were to drop one of her shoes it would fall into the water; she presses her hands over her eyes, then looks about her again, and now she perceives a man in the water, swimming down the stream as fast as he can, but making for the opposite bank.

Her first impulse now is to scramble to her feet, then she looks at Tavenner with a soft wonderment in her eyes, and she asks, timidly:

"Have you saved me again?"

"Yes, it has been my good fortune to be on the right spot at the right moment," he replies, with a tender smile; "but who is that man — why was he trying to drown you?"

"His name is Jem Blake," she replies, drooping her white eyelids; "he was one of the grooms at Stanmoor, but a relative of his has left him some money and he wanted me to promise to marry him."

"And you would not promise?" he asks, in a tone that makes her lift her head suddenly; her eyes flash and the word "I!" escapes her lips.

Only for an instant, however.

The look in his eyes makes her droop her own head again, and she says, in a low tone:

"No; I would rather have died than made such a promise."

"Ah! then it is well for all of us that I came this way in the nick of time," he responds; "and yet it is the merest chance in the world that brings me here."

"Yes, I thought you were on your way to Bulgaria," she says, impulsively. "I thought that perhaps I should never see you again."

"But how should you know anything about my going to Bulgaria?" he asks, in surprise.

And she answers, without waiting to consider the prudence of her words:

"Lord Claude showed me this morning the letter that you had written to him about his sister."

"Lord Claude showed it to you?" he asks, in tones of mingled amazement and displeasure.

And Hetty droops her head still lower, while a burning blush covers her cheeks as she murmurs, faintly:

"Yes."

"Come, I must know more about this," says Tavenner, decisively. "That fellow won't trouble you any more at present; there is a seat under that tree, where you will be sheltered from the sun."

Hetty cannot judge from his tone whether he is pleased or angry; she is only conscious of the bliss of being in his presence.

More she does not ask, does not dare to hope for.

Her heart is beating wildly, as it never beat before, and she follows him meekly to the garden-seat indicated, and seats herself in the farthest corner, clasps her small, shapely hands upon her knees, and with downcast eyes and with wavering color on her cheeks waits for him to begin.

CHAPTER XVI.

HETTY HAMBLIN is leaning against one arm of the long garden seat. Gilbert Tavenner is at the opposite end.

There is ample room for two persons to sit between them, but as nobody else is there the space remains vacant, both of them seeming to be anxious to keep as far from the other as possible.

Perhaps Hetty is the most nervous of the two. She holds a flower in her hand that she had fastened at her throat this morning, and which had escaped destruction in her struggle with Jem Blake ; but now in her agitation she is pulling it to pieces, unconscious of what she is doing.

Gilbert watches her silently.

They had come here ostensibly to talk, but words seem to fail both of them ; or it may be that this silence is more eloquent than speech, for neither of them feels it irksome. She is disinclined to break it, and it is only the recollection that he is at this moment due at Hindfleet Hall that makes Gilbert rouse himself to say, thoughtfully :

"We came here to talk matters over, did we not ?"

"Yes," assents Hetty, faintly.

"To begin, then," he continues, "do you mind telling me how it happens that you and Lord Claude Irongate are upon such terms that he should show you his private letters ? "

A sigh, that is deep enough for a sob, makes poor Hetty's breast heave with emotion.

She fears that what she is going to say will forever lower her in the esteem of the man before her ; but she is not a girl to shirk the truth, however much that truth may be against herself ; and now, though the color forsakes her cheeks and the light of love fades slowly out of her eyes, she steadies her voice and says, slowly :

"You remember the afternoon when we escaped from the bull ?"

He mutters an affirmative.

"When I returned home," she continues, "my mother did not observe my agitation, nor did she make any remark about the length of time I had been away, for Lord Claude had been with her during my absence, and had told her that he wished to make me his wife as soon as his sister was married; and — and" — she falters for a moment, then nerves herself to say — "and he told her that you were engaged to mary Lady Daphne."

"What had my engagement to do with the matter?" he cries, hotly.

"I don't know," she replies, in a tone in which she struggles hard to keep out all sound of pain. "I suppose he told her about it to account for his not wishing to get married at once."

"Well, and what did you say when you heard all this?" asked Gilbert, sternly.

"I said at first that I wouldn't marry him, that I disliked him exceedingly, that I would rather be a poor working girl all my life than be his wife. At first my mother was angry, then she wept and entreated me, for her sake, not to be so self-willed. My mother was a lady once, you know," adds the girl, pitifully, "and she ran away from her father's house to marry my father, and I am afraid she has regretted the step ever since."

She pauses, her eyes drooping, her hands clasped, her breast heaving tumultuously.

Surely if anything could warn Gilbert Tavenner of the unwisdom of emulating King Cophetua, and giving his hand to a beggar-maid, it would be this simple story of Mrs. Hamblin's life, told in a few words by one of the principal sufferers. But he is thinking rather of the speaker than of what she says, and the lesson passes by him unheeded.

Seated as he is, so near to her, and yet so far away, with the compelling power of mutual love linking them together;

with all the arguments which prudence and worldly wisdom and a high sense of honor can bring to bear upon his mind keeping them apart, Gilbert Tavenner has self-control and manliness enough to assume an indifference which he does not feel, though he watches Hetty intently, notes every curve of her graceful form, the perfect molding and the delicate tints of her beautiful face, and he sighs audibly; the temptation to take her in his arms, to call her his beloved one, to kiss her sweet lips, her eyes, her brow, to hold her as his own against all the world, being almost more than he can resist.

But he does resist it.

A vow on one side, her spotless innocence on the other, nerve him to keep the one and spare the other, and, after another deep-drawn sigh, he breaks the silence, and asks:

"Then I am to understand that your mother's tears melted your resolution, and you at last consented to do as she wished."

"No, not exactly," she replies, in a slow, sad tone; "somehow I could not promise that. It seemed to hurt me here whenever I tried to do so" — and she presses her left hand upon her heart — "but I at length consented to try to like him, and my mother at the same time promised me that I should not marry any one until I am eighteen."

"A strange compact!" he mutters, bitterly; "and a dangerous one. It would be better for you, my poor child, to either accept Lord Claude unconditionally or send him quite away."

"Do you think so?" asks Hetty, quietly; but there is a flash of light in her eyes which he does not understand.

If he could read her thoughts he would be inclined to say that girls are "kittle cattle," for she takes his words as a distinct recommendation to accept Lord Claude without reserve, and she mentally resents it accordingly.

"Yes," he muses, speaking his thoughts aloud, "it ought to be one thing or another. But yet, despite all you have

told me, I cannot understand why he should show you my letter concerning his sister."

"He showed it to me, I think, because he was vexed at not being able to get her 'off his hands,' to use his own words," she replies, steadily and coldly, still nursing her resentment against him.

"But why is he in such a hurry?" asks Gilbert.

"Because he is now in a hurry to marry me," she replies, quietly. "He asked me this morning if I thought I could live under the same roof with Lady Daphne, but I declined. I suppose you would not advise me to make that experiment?"

"No!" exclaims Gilbert, passionately; "she hates you with a hatred that, happily, is rare, even among women."

"Why does she hate me?" asks Hetty, forgetting her resentment, in surprise at this startling statement.

His face flushes as her star-like eyes look so steadily into his.

To answer her question truthfully, to say, "Because I love you; because she knows that you are her rival in my heart;" would be to abandon all his defenses, to cast himself a suppliant at her feet.

The temptation to thus surrender is so great that only his vow to his mother keeps him now from saying words that, once uttered, can never be unsaid. He knows that he ought to fly from Hetty's presence, that he ought to put the sea and the mountains and the rivers between himself and her; and he rises to his feet, half resolved to fly, to say good-by abruptly, and leave her.

But this half resolution takes him only a step or two.

If Hetty were in the slightest degree a coquette; if she were making any effort whatever to win him; if she smiled, or pouted, put on languishing airs, or wept and appeared to be overcome with grief, he would be on his guard at once.

There is nothing of this about her, however. She is one

of Nature's gentlewomen; she is natural as an untutored child; she never forgets her lowly position; and though Lord Claude is her suitor, that his lordship really means to marry her, yet Hetty has never assumed, implied, or seemed to think it possible that he himself can love her, or can entertain the thought of ever making her his wife.

It is this straightforward innocence that appeals to his heart more even than her beauty, and the fact that thrice he has been able to come to her rescue; that this morning he has, without doubt, saved her life; all gives her a claim upon his consideration, which makes an abrupt departure upon his part next to impossible.

In addition to this comes the feeling that he must offer some justification for his own conduct.

No one knows better than himself that, if he has not talked of love to this girl, his eyes have told the story that his lips were too prudent to speak; and his heart throbs with the intoxicating consciousness that her eyes have returned the lingering gaze — that if he opened wide his arms to her and said "Come," that her heart would respond to the call, as the needle vibrates to the pole.

Thus battling with his own heart, he paces to and fro among the trees, his head bent in thought, while Hetty sits on the garden-seat watching him.

How Hetty admires Gilbert Tavenner's tall, stalwart form, his broad shoulders, his head set so grandly upon them; his handsome face, his dark brown waving hair; and his eyes, which she cannot see now for the long, curling lashes that hide them as they are bent upon the ground, but the color of which she knows so well.

Oh, if Lord Claude were like him! Ay, if Jem Blake had been like him in heart and soul, as well as person, then how gladly and without coercion would she have given the promise that was demanded from her on the pain of death!

She is thus musing, when he stops suddenly in his walk and flings himself down on the seat by her side.

"Hetty," he says, abruptly, "I think I ought to tell you why I cannot marry; or rather," he adds, correcting himself, "why I can only marry a woman in my own rank of life."

She looks at him, open-eyed, in unbounded surprise, and if he were not so absorbed in his own thoughts, he would realize that this confidence is the very last thing she would expect of him — that for the moment, indeed, she does not understand why it is given.

But he is talking to himself quite as much as he is talking to her; he is trying to array all the obstacles to his marrying her before his own mind, to strengthen him to resist the sweet temptation.

And she listens in amazement, not at what he tells her so much as the manner in which he speaks, as though she had made some claim upon him which he is trying to demonstrate that he cannot satisfy; till at length indignation and maidenly pride get the better of all other considerations, and she cries, impatiently:

"Good heavens! Mr. Tavenner, I am not asking you to marry me!"

"No, Hetty; but if it were not for these obstacles, I should ask you to marry me," he replies, simply.

His words silence and astonish her; in her wildest dreams the idea that Mr. Tavenner would think of marrying her had never found a place.

The news that he was engaged to Lady Daphne Irongate had, it is true, fallen upon her heart like a blow; but still it had not crushed out the hope that she would one day be his wife, because that hope had never taken form in her breast.

He has always seemed so far away from her, so far above her, that her own love for him, which she can no longer ignore, has seemed rather like

> The desire of a moth for a star,
> Of the night for the morrow,

than an earthly love, that can ever attain full and honorable fruition.

Her silence torments him.

What to her has seemed so strange, so blissful, so overwhelming, has in it nothing wonderful to him, because it has been growing in his mind for days and for weeks past; and, as she does not move or speak — as her eyes no longer seek his, but are gazing through the trees in the direction of the river, with a far-away look in them, as though she were communing with pure spirits who might not reveal themselves to him — he grows restless, and at length he asks, impatiently:

"Why don't you speak to me, Hetty? Why don't you tell me that I am right, or convince me that I am wrong?"

She draws a long breath, as if it took her some time and needed a great effort to come back to earth.

A faint blush steals over her cheeks — a smile that is both sweet and sad parts her lips — and she answers, simply:

"What can I say? What would you like me to say?

"If it were only my liking to be considered!" he cries, impulsively, his passion getting the mastery of his reason, his overmastering desire to call her his own dwarfing every other consideration.

And even as he speaks he is moving nearer to her, when Hetty says, quietly:

"There is my mother coming toward us. Shall we go and meet her, or stay where we are?"

"Stay where we are," replies Gilbert, leaning back in his own corner of the seat; "it will give us a second or two longer together. And listen to me, Hetty. I am going away to-morrow for months, it may be for years. Perhaps we shall never meet again. But what I have told you is true, and if my mother ever absolves me from my vow, and at the same time you are free, I shall come and ask you to share my lot with me. I don't ask you to wait for me, it

will not be fair to do so, but I swear that I will never marry any other woman while you are free!"

The girl makes no answer. She can only listen and drink into her heart every word that he utters, for her mother is rapidly coming near her, and even now Mrs. Hamblin asks, angrily:

"Hetty, what are you doing here? You ought to have come in to dinner an hour ago!"

She looks haughtily and inquiringly at Tavenner as she speaks, and he, gazing at her with an interest he has never before felt in the trainer's wife, can well believe her daughter's assertion that she was a lady; and, as he looks at her, he realizes that she would be no friend to his suit, even if he were able to come forward openly as a claimant for her daughter's hand.

But he rises to his feet, lifts his hat courteously, and says:

"Your daughter has not yet recovered from her fright at nearly being the victim of a madman."

"A madman!" repeats Mrs. Hamblin, incredulously.

Yes," he replies, quietly. "I was walking up the lane, when I heard a shriek for help, and cries of 'Murder!' I leaped the fence, saw a man carrying a struggling girl to the river's brink. I was just in time to snatch her from his grasp as he was about to leap with her into the stream."

"And that girl was you, Hetty?" asks her mother, still disbelieving.

"Yes, mother, it was I; and the man was Jem Blake," replies the girl, earnestly. "If it had not been for Mr. Tavenner, I should have been lying at the bottom of the river now; and see how my hands are bruised and torn."

The sight of her daughter's sufferings produces an instantaneous change in Mrs. Hamblin.

Hetty's injured fingers convince her of the truth of what she has been told; they likewise stifle many suspicions

regarding both of them that had risen in her breast, and she says, gratefully :

"I can only say thank you, sir, for saving my daughter's life ; but now I must take her home. Those hands must be attended to at once."

"Yes, I had no idea they were in that condition," he says, with almost unnecessary concern. "Good-by, Hetty ; take care of yourself, and don't wander about alone. I go abroad to-morrow. Good-day, madam."

He lifts his hat to Mrs. Hamblin and turns away.

Thus they part ; these two whose hearts should be one.

CHAPTER XVII.

THREE months after they are married, Laurence Trevor takes his young bride to a pretty house on the banks of the Thames, which he has purchased for her.

He wishes to be kind and generous to Eugenie, he explains to her that the house and furniture have been bought in her name, and, therefore, are absolutely her own property; he likewise gives her a check-book, and tells her that he has so arranged his affairs that she shall have three hundred a year for her own dress and for housekeeping purposes.

But tears rise to Eugenie's eyes as she accepts the check-book, and she asks, pitifully:

"Are you going away from me ? Are you going to take a long journey, that you thus make provision for my welfare ? "

"I don't know," he replies, evasively, "I don't know that I shall have to go a long journey just yet, but I shall constantly have to make short ones. And I should not like you to be straightened for money at any time during my absence; besides, having this income at your own disposal, you will know that you must not exceed it."

"Yes, that is true," she responds, cheerfully; "but could

you not take me with you, Laurie? I would not be any trouble; I am a capital traveler, and I am never happy except I am with you. When I am alone, I always dread that my brother or Di Castro are coming to take me away with them."

"Your brother and his friend have no doubt gone to Mexico, and will trouble themselves no more about you, my dear," he replies. "But now let us forget all about them and be jolly. Would you like to go to a theater to-night?"

"Yes, very much," she answers, delightedly; "if you can afford it."

"Oh, I can afford it," he returns, with an uneasy laugh; "but see that you dress yourself prettily, and I will take you to the Imperial to dine. Your new cook will be sure not to give us anything fit to eat to-night."

Eugenie assents. She is as easily pleased as a child with a new toy, provided her husband is with her. It is only when she is alone that the solitude of her position terrifies her.

She has no friends or companions, no one in whose sympathizing ear she can confide her anxieties; and at these times she will sit for long hours during the day, her hands hanging listlessly upon her lap, her eyes fixed upon vacancy, her music, her painting and her needle-work neglected, her thoughts wandering back into the past, unless they are vainly trying to follow her absent husband.

If she were a woman of more energy of character or one more versed in the ways of the world she would make some plan for following him when he leaves her and for being near him when he leasts suspects it.

But such an idea as this never enters Eugenie's simple, passionate heart.

She has never in her life traveled alone. To walk from her brother's house in Gordon Square to the British Museum close by had at first been considered so unsafe that a servant accompanied her; and though, by the time we first knew

her, she had got over this timidity, she is still as incapable as a child of acting or thinking for herself independently of her husband.

Only her great love for Trevor, her loathing of Di Castro and her fear of her brother impelled her to take the decided step of escaping from the latter as she had done.

She has nothing of which to complain when her husband is with her; perhaps he is not quite as lover-like as he used to be, but he is never unkind; and if he would spend more time in her society, and introduce her to some of his friends, she would be as happy as the day is long.

This evening she forgets all her discontent, as she attires herself in a lemon-colored dress of soft, clinging silk, which shows the outline of her figure, and offers a bright contrast to her dark beauty.

It is made in a classical and artistic fashion, too, and there is something about her face, and the half-dreamy manner in which she moves about, that would make any stranger decide she must be an artist, a musician, or a poet.

Perhaps it was this impression, added to her evident love for himself, that induced Laurence Trevor to commit the imprudence of marrying her. As he looks at her critically now, he comes to the conclusion that it must have been this charm; and he asks himself a serious question regarding this wife of his, a question which he almost answers in the affirmative, but which, unhappily for himself and for her, he never again repeats.

He is very attentive to her this evening. They dine at one of the newest and largest hotels in London, then they drive to Drury Lane Theater, where they arrive after the play has well begun.

Trevor had secured a box near the stage, but on the same line as the dress-circle, and Eugenie is presently quite as much interested in looking at the audience as at the performers.

It is the first time she has been in an English theater;

everything is new to her, and she sits in the front of the box and uses her opera glasses, unconscious of the attention she is herself attracting.

They are a remarkable couple at all times. He with his bright golden hair, his long, drooping mustache, his blue eyes, fair complexion and patrician features; she with her large, black eyes, her dark skin, her abundant hair, the deep, rich red of her cheeks and lips, and the air of languor and of half-hidden passion which such a nature as hers must always express.

No one meeting them can fail to turn and look a second time, but on this particular evening Eugenie has lost the fear of her brother and of Di Castro. She believes that they would never go to a theater to look for her, and she secretly hopes that, satisfied by the sight of her certificate that she is married, her brother has left her to her fate and gone off to Mexico, as he intended to do.

There is an interval between the acts. The house is lighted up, and, Trevor, looking from his box toward the stalls, recognizes the face of a man who is looking at him intently, and he mutters under his breath:

"What an infernal nuisance! I must go and speak to him or he will come up here and I shall have to introduce them."

A few seconds afterward he says, carelessly, to Eugenie:

"There is a man down-stairs that I know. I shall be back soon; don't go out of the box till I return."

Then he leaves her, and the young wife looks down into the stalls curiously, eager to see the man whom her husband knows.

The man in question is older than Trevor; he is good-looking and carefully dressed, but his full, gray eyes are half hidden by the heavy eyelids, and there is something in his manner and in the way in which he stares up at herself that makes Eugenie look over his head and appear not to see him.

If the poor girl could overhear the conversation between this man and her husband, could even hear the names by which they address each other, her surprise would be unbounded. But she does not; her awakening from her dream of happiness is yet to come.

The curtain rises; Eugenie's attention is attracted to the stage. When she looks back to the stalls her husband and his companion have disappeared, and she naturally expects that they will come to her; but they do not. More than half-an-hour elapses before Trevor returns, alone, and then his wife finds him taciturn and moody.

"Who is the gentleman who has kept you so long?" she asks, with natural curiosity.

"A man whom I have known for a long time," he replies, evasively.

"He has a name, hasn't he?" she persists.

And he retorts, angrily:

"He has a name, but I didn't choose to introduce him to you. He isn't the kind of man one would take into the bosom of one's family. He did very well for a bachelor acquaintance. And now, if you are tired, we will go home."

"Yes, I am ready," she replies.

But just then the curtain falls. Her wraps have to be put on, and the corridors and staircase are crowded by the time they get down into the entrance hall.

Here Eugenie sees her husband's late companion, who does not attempt to join them, though he stares at her in such a manner as to make the warm blood mantle her cheeks with confusion.

What does his glance mean? Is it a look of pity or of bold admiration?

She cannot tell, she has scarcely time to ask herself the question before Trevor, who does not observe him, hurries her past; and then she utters a cry of terror, as a bearded,

black-eyed Mexican springs forward, clutches her by the wrist, and cries aloud :

"Eugenie de Mæstro, I find you at last!"

"Unhand this lady, she is my wife!" exclaims Trevor, haughtily; and the man, staring at both of them, is hustled aside by the police, and in the confusion Eugenie and her companion hurry through the crowd, get into a hansom cab, and are rapidly driven away.

"Who was that?" demands Trevor of the trembling woman at his side.

And she nervously answers :

"It is Di Castro."

"Ah!" mutters Trevor; "a regular brigand. I thought it could not be your brother; we should not have disposed of him so easily. But it was very awkward happening where it did; however, it could not be helped. I was obliged to claim you as my wife, or he would have carried you off under my very nose."

She nestles closer to his side, and whispers low :

"I am your wife, dearest."

Her fear of Di Castro had begun to die away; now it revives again. She had hoped that the baffled Mexican had gone back to his own country, but now she knows that he is still in England, and she will never feel safe unless her husband is near her.

It is therefore with a distinct foreboding of evil that she listens to Trevor the next morning at breakfast, when he tells her that he shall have to leave her again for a few days.

"But you have now a house of your own to look after," he continues, lightly; "you will have to arrange everything to your own liking, and get your servants into order. If I were you, also, I should start a new picture; there is nothing like occupation for keeping one's mind from brooding."

"Why should I have cause for brooding?" she asks,

roused to self-assertion by his words, which seem to imply that she will but rarely see him. "Why should I be left alone in this manner?" she continues. "I am your wife, and I have a right to go where you go."

"You would sometimes find it very unpleasant to go where I go," he retorts, with an angry laugh. "But it is useless making a fuss, my dear; if you are ill-tempered and full of complaints when you see me, it will only make me stay away the longer; while if you are smiling and are glad to receive me, I shall spend as much time with you as possible."

Eugenie bites her tongue to keep unsaid the stinging words that seem as though they will be uttered, and her cheek flushes hotly; but she restrains herself by a great effort, and tries to smile and seem cheerful, though to a man who unselfishly loved her the smile would seem more pitiful than tears.

Trevor scarcely notices it, however; he is getting tired of the tie which binds him to Eugenie, and in this frame of mind he leaves her, promising to write on the following day, and saying vaguely that he shall come home again as soon as he can.

The rest of that day Eugenie spends in weeping.

"What is the use of a pretty house in which to live, and of money to spend, if you have no one with whom you can share it?" Eugenie asks herself the question, passionately, and casts about in her own mind whether she knows anybody whom she can ask to come and see her.

She cannot write to any of her brother's friends, for fear of their at once acquainting Leon with her whereabouts; and she has been in England too short a time to have many friends of her own. But there was one of the art students at the museum whom she would like to see again, and she is half tempted to seek her.

What Miss Mertonville's address is she does not know. She would not dare to go again to the museum; but one

day, about a week after Trevor's departure, she determines to visit Burlington House, and see if she can find her there.

She has only had one letter from her husband during this time, and in it he tells her that he fears he shall be detained from her side longer than he expected; but he urges her to be cheerful, and advises her again to resume her drawing and painting, and also to begin a course of reading to fill up her leisure moments.

Advice which only angers her, and she tells herself passionately that she did not marry with the intention of pursuing a profession as though she had remained single.

For all this she means to follow the advice that is so unwelcome, and on this particular day she goes to Piccadilly, partly to call at an artist's color shop to order the canvas, paints, brushes, crayons and drawing-paper that she requires; partly, also, to look in at the Royal Academy and make inquiries about Miss Mertonville, whom she is anxious to see again.

Feminine curiosity tempts her into Regent street to look at the shops, and she is nearing the Circus when a pretty hat in a window attracts her attention, and she pauses to examine it, half tempted to enter the shop and become its possessor.

The thought that Laurence might not like it makes her hesitate, and several other persons have paused at the window meanwhile, one of whom, a woman, has pushed against her rather rudely, then has gone off in a hurry, and a gentleman, who has been following Eugenie for the last quarter of an hour, lifts his hat and asks, politely:

"Have you lost your purse, madam?"

For answer Eugenie thrusts her hand in her pocket, then cries, in dismay:

"It is gone! That woman must have taken it."

"Yes, I thought I saw her do so," he replies; "but she is

out of sight now. Shall we speak to a policeman? I think I could describe her."

"Oh, no; I don't think my husband would like me to do that," she replies, nervously. "I should have to go to a police court, should I not?"

"I am afraid so," he replies, gently.

"Then I shall have to lose it," she says, with a regretful sigh; "but I thank you for your courtesy, and my husband will thank you when he meets you again."

"Ah, I thought I knew you!" he exclaims, with evident satisfaction; "though I could not for the moment remember where we had met."

He evidently does not recognize her, though she seems to know him, and she smiles again as she says:

"You took my husband away from me for more than half-an-hour when we were at Drury Lane Theater a week ago. You remember me, don't you! I am Mrs. Laurence Trevor."

Still he seems puzzled, though he mentally mutters, "Confound her husband!" Then he asks, doubtfully:

"Were you the lady in lemon-colored silk, in the box just above the stalls?"

"Yes," she replies, with a smile. "I asked Laurence who you were, but he didn't tell me, though he said he had known you for a great many years."

"Oh, yes; he must have known me for years," he responds, in a tone that puzzles her.

Then he asks, curiously:

"There was a row in the hall afterward, was there not?"

"Yes," she replies, a troubled expression deepening her dark eyes.

Then, reading aright the doubtful look that comes over his face, she adds, with her natural impulsiveness:

"I ran away from home to marry Laurence. The man who caught my hand in the hall was intended for me by my brother; but don't say anything about it, please. I am still

afraid of my brother, though he has now no right to control me."

"Certainly not," he replies, amused and touched by her innocence. Then, as she adds, "Thank you again, and good-day," he hastens to exclaim:

"Pardon me, but you have lost your purse. Will you oblige me by using mine?"

"No, it is unnecessary," she answers, frankly. "I will take a cab home, and pay the man when I arrive there."

"Then let me put you into the cab?" he volunteers.

And a few minutes afterward he has the satisfaction of hearing her order the cabman to drive to the Swan's Nest, Hammersmith.

"Mrs. Laurence Trevor, the Swan's Nest, Hammersmith," he repeats to himself, as he walks on his way. "I'll make a note of that; there is some villainy here. I don't believe in women as a rule, but in this instance I do believe that she is the victim."

Meanwhile Eugenie reaches her own home in safety, but when she enters the house she is told that there is a gentleman in the drawing-room waiting to see her. And, even as the woman speaks, the door of the room in question opens and she stands face to face with her brother Leon.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Eugenie has dreaded a meeting with Leon since the hour she escaped from him at the British Museum, to link her fate with that of Laurence Trevor.

Again and again she has pictured this meeting, has thought how she would hide her face from him, and how he would scathe her with his angry words, but, now the moment has come, she meets him as coolly and calmly as though she had anticipated the visit.

"Ah! my brother!" she says, indifferently, as the serv-

ant stares at her and at him; then she advances to the room into which he has stepped back a pace or two, and says, carelessly :

"How do you do, Leon? I did not expect to find you here."

"No ; I suppose not," he replies, briefly.

Then, speaking in French, he adds :

"I find you at last, though you have eluded me successfully for three whole months."

The servant, who is listening at the key-hole, decides that it is useless to stay here if they are going to talk their "foreign lingo," and she departs at once for the kitchen.

Meanwhile, Eugenie has sunk into a chair, and is pulling the gloves from her hands, as she says, with affected indifference :

"It is more than that, Leon ; it is nearer four months than three since we parted so abruptly. And I expected, I almost hoped, that you had returned to Mexico with your friend."

"You think I fulfill my trust from the dead so indifferently as to leave you in this strange land to become an outcast?" he asks, with sorrowful reproach.

But his words rouse his sister more than stronger language could do; involuntarily she rises to her feet, throws back her head haughtily, and repeats :

"An outcast! You forget that I am a wife!"

"I cannot forget what I never knew," he returns, with concentrated bitterness.

"But have you not had my marriage certificate?" she asks, in dismay.

"Certainly not," he replies, coldly. "Had I known past all doubt that you were married and happy I should have troubled myself about you no more."

"That is what I thought," she cries, eagerly; "and I knew it was due to you to tell you what I had done. You mustn't tell Laurence," she adds, nervously; "because he

thought the certificate was stolen from me, but I put it in an envelope and posted it to you the very day I ran away, and within two or three hours of my marriage."

"Ah!" he sneers, "you began by deceiving your husband, as you deceived me."

"It is mean of you to say so," she retorts, with spirit. "If you had not insisted upon my marrying a man whom I loathed, I should have been frank with you. At any rate," she continues, as though not quite sure of herself upon this subject, "I should have asked your consent to my marrying the man whom I love."

"It would have been his place to do that," says Leon de Mæstro, coldly; "but it is useless to reproach you with what cannot be undone. Where did this marriage take place? And who is this man whom you have married?"

She tells him, repeating her anxiety to know what has become of her marriage certificate, and her regret at having parted with it.

"If what you tell me is true a copy can easily be obtained," he returns, gloomily, "and I will cause inquiries to be made about the one you posted to me; probably it was misdirected. But who is this man whom you have married? What is his name, his parentage, his position?"

She answers the first question, then adds:

"I know nothing of his family, but he is not dependent upon his profession; he has private means. He has bought this house for me and has settled money, so that I have an income while I live."

"Marvelously generous!" sneers her brother, grimly. "And where is he now?"

Her countenance falls. She has dreaded this question, and she answers, faintly:

"I don't know."

"When will he be back?" is the more stern demand.

"That I can't tell you," she replies. "I hope soon. I am never happy when he is away from me."

Her voice breaks with agitation, a suppressed sob escapes her lips and her brother's countenance grows more gloomy as he realizes that she is already neglected by the man for whom she had risked everything that makes life dear to a good woman.

"Do you know his family?" he asks, abruptly.

She replies in the negative.

"Or his friends?" he continues.

"No, I don't know anybody belonging to him!" she exclaims, passionately. "I am here alone, without a relative or a friend, and I, who used to be so silent and so reserved, sometimes feel that I would give anything to hear the sound of a human voice speaking to me in tones of kindness."

As she speaks she clasps her hands, and looks at him pitifully.

He is but her half-brother, but he is all that is left to her of kith or kin, and she knows that, despite his stern, gloomy exterior, deep down in his heart he loves her as though she were his own child.

But now he steels his heart against her, and he says, abruptly:

"I must go, but don't try to escape from me again, for I shall find you, go where you will, and if I cannot punish you, I shall take good care to punish *him!*"

"I don't want to hide from you, Leon, if you will be kind to me," Eugenie says, in pleading tones. "Forgive me for having deceived you, and let us be friends!"

She looks lovely as she pleads with him, his heart is softening toward her; but she has deceived him once, she may only mean to deceive him again. Much that she has told him has roused in his mind suspicions of which she is wholly ignorant, and he says, sternly:

"I must know first that you have not brought dishonor upon my name; if you have, I will never forgive you! Never!"

"Dishonor!" cries Eugenie, springing to her feet again, and changing in one bound from a humble suppliant into an indignant, insulted queen.

"How dare you use such a word to me?" she continues, passionately. "Your name is no more to you than it was to me when it was mine; and I prize my honor as much as any woman may! And remember, Leon de Mæstro, if there is any informality in my marriage, I have you, and you only, to thank for it. Nothing but your unwarrantable tyranny drove me to take the rash step of marrying a man about whom I knew nothing, except that I loved him! I did love him, and love him still! I am his wife in the sight of heaven, and, to the best of my knowledge, by the laws of man also!"

She clasps her hands and turns from him as she ceases to speak.

Her heart is heavy despite her indignant words, and when she looks round again to see how he has taken what she has said, she finds that he is gone.

But this interview depresses Eugenie, more even than her husband's absence. It raises in her heart doubts, which spring up again and again like rank weeds, despite all her efforts to stifle them, and for many days afterward she is a prey to nervous hopes and fears, which agitate her mind and make her cheeks grow pale and her limbs heavy and listless.

And Trevor's prolonged absence helps to increase her misery.

Every morning, when she opens her eyes, she says to herself:

"Surely he will come to-day; he must come to-day!" and she stays at home, anxious to be here to receive him; but the day dies, night sets in, and Laurence Trevor does not return to the woman who would willingly lay down her life to save him a moment's pain.

Thus a whole month passes by, and, at the end of that

time, Eugenie is so broken down with anxiety that the two servants whom she keeps take the matter into their own hands and send for a doctor.

But who can minister to a mind diseased ?

The doctor can do her no good. He tells her that she must rouse herself; he asks questions which torture her about her husband, and which she is too truthful to evade. He suggests change of scene, or a visit to the seaside as likely to brace her up, and at length leaves her, finding it impossible to make her follow any of his prescriptions.

And during all this time Leon does not reappear.

Probably he has satisfied himself as to the truth of her statement about her marriage ; Di Castro also will have been told how Trevor claimed her for his wife ; and it may be that the two men have left her to the fate she has chosen, and have gone of to their own country.

This is what Eugenie had hoped they would do. Now the thought that it is so fills her with terror, for, stern and masterful as her brother is, she can trust him, and she believes that, despite his harsh words, he would be a stanch and true friend to her if she should ever need one.

During these long, miserable days, she rarely leaves her own house and garden, though she takes no real pleasure in either.

She has not begun the new picture for which she had ordered materials. The loss of her purse that day when she went to buy them kept her from calling at Burlington House, as she had intended, and now she is glad of it; she shrinks from the thought of claiming the acquaintance of any of her old friends until Laurence returns, until she knows what her position is with regard to him.

Thus the days and the weeks go by, and Eugenie's naturally excitable temper would drive her to go to the police to make inquiries about her husband, or walk into the river at the bottom of her garden to end her own wretched life, if

another heart besides her own had not throbbed in her breast, if a new hope and a new fear had not been added to her previous perplexities.

It is the beginning of June, and Eugenie feels more listless and apathetic than usual, when a letter is brought to her at midday.

As she recognizes the handwriting her cheeks blanch, her hands tremble, and several minutes elapse before she can summon sufficient courage to open it.

Then the written words swim before her eyes, though she at length manages to read :

"My Dear Eugenie — I have been ill, otherwise I should have returned home some weeks ago. I am better now, but have to start for America within the next four-and-twenty hours, so it is impossible for me to see you before I go. Keep up your spirits, dear, and remember, if anything should happen to me, you are provided for. I shall be such a wanderer that I cannot give you any stated address beyond the inclosed, but letters sent there will eventually reach me.

"Your affectionate husband,

"Laurence Trevor."

She is still gazing at this curious espistle, when a servant announces :

"Mr. de Mæstro," and the next instant her brother Leon is before her.

"You are just in time, Leon," she says, in a tone of voice which is so unnatural to her that he stares at her in amazement.

Her face is pale, her large, black eyes are dilated. She wears a white morning-robe, and her black hair falls over her shoulders, as it used to do in the days of her girlhood. But her senses are almost paralyzed by what she has read, and she is more than half inclined to laugh in very mockery of her own woe.

"What is the matter ?" he asks, taking her hand, and speaking in a more gentle tone than is usual to him.

She makes him no answer, but hands him the letter, and he reads it to the end, his teeth closing tightly as he finishes.

"This is his farewell ?" he asks, looking at her pitifully.

"It reads like it," she replies, wearily.

"He has not been home since I was last here ?" he asks again.

A shake of the head is the answer, and for a few moments there is silence between them, broken by Leon, saying :

"Write what I dictate, and post it at once. He means no more to go to America than you or I do."

She hesitates. Her husband is dearer to her than her brother, dearer than her own life, and, badly as he seems to treat her, she would do nothing to injure him.

Her brother reads the thought that passes through her mind, and he says, promptly :

"No harm will come to him. But you must make him come here to see you. Then send me a telegram, and I will meet him and have the matter cleared up before he goes away again."

"But how am I to do it ?" she asks, helplessly. "What can I say that shall bring him here ?"

"Write and entreat him to come ; tell him that you are ill, that I have been to see you, that I have threatened to set detectives to search for him, to advertise a description of him in all the newspapers if he does not communicate with me at once. Ask what you are to do ? That will bring him, and quickly."

"But I shall be writing what is not true."

"You will be writing what is perfectly true," he retorts ; "for I will do that and more if you do not obey me. This man has something to hide, and his fears will bring him where his love could not."

Eugenie shrinks as under a lash, for the words wound her cruelly, but the letter is written and posted ; yet for the time nothing comes of it, and even Leon begins to think that Trevor is probably upon the Atlantic.

But one summer night — the night of the same day as that upon which Lord Claude Irongate attempted to kiss

Hetty Hamblin in Brent Wood, and so frightened her, that in her desire to escape him she crossed the weir, and fell into the arms of Gilbert Tavenner — Laurence Trevor walks calmly into his wife's house, as casually as though he had only been absent four or five hours, instead of twice as many weeks.

Eugenie falls upon his neck and kisses him, weeps and laughs by turns, and it is some time before he can calm her and get her to talk to him rationally.

For his own absence he makes no excuse; when their honeymoon ended he assumed that he was to do as he liked, and poor Eugenie is soon silenced when she ventures to reproach him.

But when he learns from her that their marriage will not be an unfruitful one, the frown on his brow deepens, and he asks questions about her brother and Di Castro, which she has scarcely the courage to answer.

"So your brother comes daily," he asks, gloomily, having extorted so much from her.

"Yes, he comes when he will," she replies, timidly; "he wants to see you; and he has more than once hinted that your name is not Trevor. But it is — isn't it, Laurence?"

"Of course it is!" he replies, bruskly.

Then he asks, sharply:

"When does this brother of yours intend to favor us with a visit again?"

"He will be here to-morrow, I suppose," she replies, nervously; "but it will be best for you to see him, Laurence, and get it over."

"Yes, I suppose so," he returns, shortly; and the subject drops until the next morning, when Trevor says, abruptly:

"I have to go to the city early; but you can ask your brother to stay to dinner if he calls. I suppose I shall be back about five o'clock."

"You don't give me much of your company, Laurence," pouts the young wife.

And he answers, carelessly :

"I give you as much as I can. But I wish you would fetch me a pocket-book I left upstairs ; I don't care to send a servant for it."

She rises to obey, and when she has left the room, and the door is closed upon her, he takes a small phial from his waistcoat pocket, empties its contents into her half-finished cup of coffee, then drops the empty bottle among the cottons in a pretty workstand that happens to be close at hand.

The dastardly deed is done swiftly, and he is reading his newspaper when Eugenie returns from her fruitless search, the book being subsequently found in his own pocket.

He waits until she has finished her breakfast, he sees her drink the whole of the drugged coffee ; and then, remarking that he will be late for his appointment, he hastens to leave the house, enjoining his wife to be sure and keep her brother till his return.

Two hours later, when Leon de Mæstro calls at the Swan's Nest, he finds the servants in dismay, and his sister in a deep stupor, from which two doctors are vainly trying to rouse her.

"The doctors say my mistress has taken poison," volunteers one of the servants.

While the other adds, indignantly :

"I don't believe she went to do it, sir, for she was quite happy and cheerful this morning ; and the master told her to be sure to keep you till he returned. I heard him say it myself when he kissed her at the door as he went out."

"Has your master been back ?" asks Leon, his dark eyes blazing with sudden suspicion.

"Yes, sir ; he came home last night, and went away this morning," is the answer. "But he is expected home to dinner."

It is needless to say that Laurence Trevor did not return

to dinner; and, had he done so, there would be none for him.

All through that day and long into the night the doctors, the servants, and Leon are working hard to counteract the effects of the deadly poison which Eugenie has swallowed; and the next morning dawns, finding them worn out at their task, the result of their efforts still undecided.

CHAPTER XIX.

Mrs. Hamblin is ill at ease. Her maternal instinct warns her that Jem Blake's desperate suit is not the only danger to the success of her plans for making Hetty accept the hand of Lord Claude Irongate.

What Hetty and Gilbert Tavenner have told her about Jem's murderous attempt she is obliged to believe, for her daughter's scratched and torn hands attest to the truth of the story; but she feels that they have not told her all, and that they have had something more than this to talk about while they were seated under the trees.

Even now, though Tavenner is gone, she can see an ecstatic expression lingering upon Hetty's face, giving a softer charm to her lovely eyes, an added sweetness to her lips, such as Lord Claude has never been able to bring there; and the anxious mother knows, with unerring certainty, that it is a girl's first love that is the glorious beautifier.

She had wondered how it came about that Hetty was so indifferent to Lord Claude's devotion, and why she shrank with such repugnance from the idea of becoming his wife; but she understands it now — the image of another is enshrined in the girl's heart, and she clings to this love as she clings to her life.

This discovery troubles the trainer's wife greatly; it not only threatens to upset all her plans for her daughter's

social elevation, but she considers it more than probable that it will cause her child endless disappointment and life-long misery.

"He will not dare to marry her while his mother lives, even if he wishes it," she thinks, sadly; "and I doubt if he does wish it. The Tavenners were always a proud race, and his mother is prouder than any of them."

Thus she muses mournfully, but she says nothing of the thoughts that pass through her mind; she feels that this love will thrive least if it is ignored — if it is supposed not to exist; and when she has taken her daughter home, and bandaged her hands, she says, thoughtfully:

"I almost think it would be best, Hetty, for us to be silent about Jem Blake to your father, and to every one, unless he shows himself in this neighborhood again."

"Very well, mother," she replies, though she is sorely tempted to ask, "Why?"

The explanation, however, is soon given.

"If the matter comes to your father's ears," continues Mrs. Hamblin, thoughtfully, "he will at once apply to the police and have the fellow arrested. That would be right enough, he richly deserves severe punishment; but see what it entails. You will have to go into court to prosecute the man, Mr. Tavenner will be called as a witness, and all kinds of disagreeable things may be brought to light and published in the newspapers about all of us."

"Yes, mother, you are quite right!" exclaims Hetty, quickly. "I would not go into a court of law for anything if I could help it, and I could not bear the talk and the scandal that such a thing would provoke. But could we not go away from here for a little while? I shall dread that Jem Blake will spring upon me whenever I see a movement in the bushes, the very thought of him makes me tremble; and then," with a sigh, "Lord Claude wearies me so intolerably!"

"I think you are very ungrateful to Lord Claude," retorts

her mother, sharply. "He puts aside his rank and wealth and dignity to win you for his wife, and you show your appreciation of his disinterestedness by saying that he wearies you."

"And the most ungrateful part of it is, that I only speak the truth," returns Hetty, gravely.

Mrs. Hamblin makes no answer. She quite understands that Hetty is desirous of expressing her real sentiments toward Lord Claude and freeing herself from his unwelcome attentions, and she is determined not to give her the opportunity if she can help it; so she begins to invent a story to account for the injured hands, and when this is satisfactorily arranged she says, with a smile:

"Your father and I were talking about you this morning, and we decided that you and I shall go to the seaside for a week or two. Now, where would you like to go to?"

"Lord Claude is not to pay the expense of our journey, is he?" asks Hetty, quickly.

And her mother replies, promptly:

"No, certainly not; your father and Chris will pay all the cost, so just make up your mind what place you would like to see."

"This is a matter that requires consideration," replies Hetty, smiling brightly at the thought of a change; and she gets a map of England, and sits down at the table and looks at the names of the towns and villages on the east and south coast, thinking of the delight of sitting by the seashore, and dreaming of him who by that time will have crossed the blue water and be traveling upon a foreign soil.

Suddenly she looks up to her mother, who is standing by her side, and asks, quietly:

"Do you intend Lord Claude to know where we go, mother?"

Mrs. Hamblin's face changes, and she replies, evasively:

"If he asks the question, we can scarcely refuse to tell him."

"That is true," returns Hetty; "but you can tell him, mother, that I don't wish him to follow us. I wish to be free from him — for a time, at any rate."

She adds these last words, seeing the frown gather upon her mother's brow; and when the latter makes some remark about the impossibility of saying this to his lordship, the girl exclaims, impatiently:

"Then I might just as well stay at home; indeed, I would rather do so. It would spoil all my pleasure in wandering about on the seashore if I am to meet Lord Claude at every turn."

"What's that?" asks Joe Hamblin, coming into the room in time to hear a portion of this protest.

Hetty repeats this objection, and her father says, promptly:

"You are quite right, my dear; when you go away for a change have it, and don't trouble yourself about anything else; run wild on the sands and the rocks for a little while, and then you'll come back to your old father bright and bonny."

Hetty smiles gratefully, while her mother leaves the room in displeasure; but as soon as he is alone with his daughter, Joe Hamblin's tone and manner become confidential, and he says, hurriedly:

"Your mother wants you to marry Lord Claude, Hetty, and there's no denying it's a wonderful match for you; but you shan't be made to have him against your will, remember that; if it comes to a tussle with the white sergeant at any time, I'll take your part against her, so will Chris. It's true I should like to see you married to a rich man who would make you happy, but you shall please yourself, Hetty; only, remember, my girl, 'as you make your bed you'll have to lie on it.' I told your mother that; when she would marry me, but it didn't make the least difference."

He sighs as he finishes speaking, as though thoughts of the past brought nothing but pain.

"Dear father, I hope I shall please both of you if I ever do marry," replies Hetty, kissing him fondly; "but I don't want to think about it yet; I want to be left alone with you and mother and Chris, and my books and painting. And, now, where shall we go? Do you know any pretty place by the seaside where there are no fine people, and where we can run about just as we like?"

"Why, yes," replies Joe, brightly; "there's a fishing village down in Suffolk, with fine bracing air, any length of sands, plenty of salt marshes, and a wide common where you can almost lose yourself; it's a bit this side of Southwold; I mind the place well. I'm going to Colneford this evening, and I'll bring back a railway guide with me."

"Yes, do, father," she exclaims, brightly; "that's where we will go unless mother objects. I'll begin to get our things together at once."

"All right," he replies; "as soon as you like. I shall get a holiday while you are away, and run down to see your mother and you; but what's the matter with your hands—burned them?"

"No, I have got them badly scratched," she replies, carelessly; "but they will be better soon."

Then she seeks her mother, to talk to her about the place in Suffolk to which she wishes to go, and before they retire to rest that evening their plans are all made, and they decide to start for Walberswick, the fishing village in question, on the day after to-morrow.

When Lord Claude appears at Stanmoor the morning after this decision is arrived at, he is disappointed at not finding Hetty under the big cedar, painting as usual.

His own easel, canvas, paints and brushes had been brought here by a servant an hour ago, and here they stand, unpacked and alone.

He knocks at the door of the house and is shown by Molly, the servant, into the sitting-room, where Mrs. Hamblin is sewing and Hetty is reclining on a couch reading.

The fair girl's face is pale, her beautiful eyes look heavy and weary ; she is suffering to-day from the fright and shock of yesterday, and the lacerated hands give her much more pain than they did when the nails and splinters tore the delicate flesh.

Altogether she is unnerved, languid and depressed, and even the prospect of change of scene is not sufficient to rouse her.

Lord Claude comes forward eagerly to take her hand as usual, but he starts back in dismay as he perceives how both of them are bandaged, as though they had been badly burned.

"What is the matter ?" he asks, with lover-like solicitude.

"I met with an accident yesterday," replies Hetty, faintly, "and I don't feel well to-day. You will excuse me from getting up, won't you ?"

"Certainly," he replies, tenderly ; "but I am grieved to find you like this. You must have advice at once. I will send for Doctor Bradford. He is decidedly the best doctor in the neighborhood."

"No ; please don't do anything of the kind !" cries Hetty, quickly. "I don't want a doctor ; it is change of air that I need, and mother is going to take me to the sea-side to-morrow."

"Indeed !" he exclaims, in an offended tone. "And where are you going ?"

Mrs. Hamblin, who is sitting by, tells him, adding :

"Hetty has not been well for some little time, and her father and I think the sea air might do her good. The place to which we are going is on the east coast, and I am told that the air is very bracing. We shall be quite alone, and shall be away about a fortnight."

"Oh, I shall come down and join you certainly," says his lordship, with the air of one who has a right to do so.

There is an interval of silence.

Hetty waits for her mother to speak, but the latter is

intent upon her work and is conveniently deaf to the remark.

It is the girl, therefore, who at length says:

"Please don't do anything of the kind, my lord. Mother and I will go to cheap, humble lodgings, and would like to be alone. We are going for the sake of my health — not for pleasure — and we shall be much more comfortable if we are left to ourselves."

"You had much better consent to what I proposed yesterday," he says, significantly; "there would be no humble lodgings then. You could go where you like, have whatever you fancy; I would even make my sister find another home if you desire it."

"Oh, no; such a thing is out of the question!" exclaims Hetty, hurriedly, while her face flushes hotly. "I told you so yesterday, my lord."

"Hetty is so young," here interposes Mrs. Hamblin, in her softest tones. "She is not in good health, and that makes her capricious and discontented. She will be better after our trip, and with renewed health will become more sensible, I hope."

Lord Claude mutters something under his breath, turns to the open window and stands moodily looking out over the small garden to the thick shrubbery beyond.

He is vexed with Hetty.

She never seems to have forgiven him for that first attempt of his to steal a kiss, and more than once since he came openly to woo her he has felt so much irritated by her coldness and ill-concealed aversion that he has half resolved to go and leave her to her lowly lot; or, better still, send her father away and get rid of the Hamblins altogether.

But half resolutions go but a short way when they are opposed by a man's eager, passionate love for a girl who is hard to win, yet who does not seem to be altogether inaccessible.

And it is not Hetty's beauty alone that attracts him; lovely as she is, he would probably ere this have tired of her if she had been ready or eager to accept his suit.

Her very coldness, her evident desire to get away from him, fans his passion to fever heat; and he is wondering by what excuse he can get her mother out of the room, so that he may make one more appeal to her to marry him at once, and let him take her away from her humble surroundings, when a movement among the shrubs that he has been looking at attracts his attention.

The movement is peculiar — it is slow and cautious; once indeed he catches sight of the head of a man peering about, as though he were spying over the premises, while he is himself desirous to be hidden.

Whatever Lord Claude's failings may be, personal cowardice is not one of them.

Watching the man cautiously approaching the house, while hiding himself among the tall shrubs, he instantly realizes that some mischief is intended to Hetty or her mother.

It is just the hour when Joe Hamblin and the men engaged in the stables, which lie at the back of the house, will be most busy. Even the maid servant is likely to be out of the way at this time in the morning, and Lord Claude, as he sees that the man is slowly coming nearer, himself steps farther back into the room, so that he may not be observed by him.

"What is it, my lord?" asks Mrs. Hamblin, in sudden alarm, as she observes the movement.

"There is a man hiding among the shrubs and young trees," he replies, slowly. "I have been watching him for several minutes. He seems to be coming nearer to the house, and his movements are so suspicious that I want to watch him without his seeing me."

His words send a thrill of terror through Hetty's heart.

She springs to her feet, clasps her bandaged hands upon her breast, and cries fearfully:

"It is Jem Blake! He tried to murder me directly after you left me yesterday. I only escaped as by a miracle; it was by him that my hands were injured as they are. Oh, where is father; let us call him at once, mother!"

"Be quiet, Hetty!" exclaims Mrs. Hamblin, angrily. "You are in no danger from him now."

She is vexed with her daughter for revealing in her terror what she had thought it prudent to hide, and she knows that Lord Claude is displeased when he asks, sternly:

"Who is Jem Blake?"

There are times when the outspoken truth alone can help us.

Mrs. Hamblin feels that this is the case now, and she says, promptly:

"Jem Blake was one of the stablemen. He has come into a little money, and has taken the insane idea into his head that he will make Hetty marry him. He frightened her terribly yesterday, and her hands were hurt in her struggle to get away from him."

"Why did you not tell me this when I came in?" he asks, suspiciously.

"We have not told even my husband," is the immediate reply. "Hetty would have done so," continues the cautious mother; "but I thought of the talk it would raise, and advised her to be silent."

"The fellow doesn't mean you to be silent," says Lord Claude, grimly, as he keeps his eyes fixed upon the slightly-moving bushes; "but I'll give him a lesson for his audacity that he won't forget in a hurry."

He glances round the room as he speaks, and his eyes rest upon a small, cruel-looking riding whip, which he takes in his hand, and smiles with satisfaction as he finds that the head of it is loaded.

"This will do," he says, quietly.

But his compressed lip, the cold, steely look that comes into his blue eyes, and his slightly-dilated nostrils frighten Hetty when she thinks of his meeting such a desperate character as Jem Blake yesterday proved himself to be; and, though she does not love her noble suitor, she cries anxiously:

"Oh, pray be careful of yourself, my lord; he hates you, and if you provoke him he may do you some deadly harm."

"I am not afraid of the fellow," he replies, smiling at her fears; "but I will take care of myself for your sake, Hetty. And now to trap the fellow, I will go out by the backdoor and make my way round; you keep him well in view, Mrs. Hamblin, and lock the door of this room when I leave it."

Then, surprising Hetty with a hurried kiss, he goes off with a light step, and a lighter heart, to give Jem Blake a sharp lesson; thinking little of Hetty's warning that the fellow will not hesitate to do him some deadly mischief.

CHAPTER XX.

STOLID and unchanging as the face of a house can look, did Stanmoor appear to the man hidden in the bushes on this particular morning.

Yesterday he had been over the same ground, in the same stealthy manner, as he watched Lord Claude and Hetty, seated under the big cedar.

Then, his breast was agitated with love and jealousy, and he regarded his lordship as a rich rival, whose rank and wealth had bribed the fair girl by his side to turn from her humble suitor and regard him with favor.

To-day he labors under no such delusion, for Hetty's feelings toward himself had yesterday been shown but too clearly to be mistaken.

She hates him — if such a gentle girl can hate any one — with an unconquerable hatred! She loathes him!

The touch of his hand is obnoxious to her; his presence offends her sight, and he can neither forgive nor forget the fact that, terrified as she was by the near presence of death, she was ready to meet the grim specter rather than promise to become his wife.

Thus it happens that yesterday, when he crept through these bushes, he hugged the hope to his heart that Hetty might yet be won; to-day that hope has left him; love has given place to a craving desire for revenge, for a sweeping revenge; and he cares not to make any plans for his own safety, provided he can but accomplish his purpose.

He is disappointed, though not surprised, to find that Hetty keeps in the house this morning, and does not even show herself at a window.

But Lord Claude's easel is under the cedar. He has seen his lordship enter the house, has caught sight of him at the window, and he feels assured, in his own mind, that Hetty and he are together in the sitting-room, talking, perhaps, about him, unless they are too much interested in thinking only of themselves; and he smiles with fiendish joy at the thought that the little revolver he carries in his pocket will quickly dispose of both of them.

For the moment he forgets Mrs. Hamblin. He never dreams that she is in the room with the lovers; he would be more inclined to suppose that she had gone out for the purpose of leaving them undisturbed, and he observes with a grin that the sitting-room window is wide open, and nothing will be more easy for him than to vault into the room, or lean over half-way, discharge his weapon and disappear as noiselessly as he came.

But it is not in his dastardly nature to walk up to the house boldly and commit the crime he meditates.

He has a fox-like face, he has a fox-like nature as well, and though he is desperate enough to risk his own life for the sake of securing his revenge he is cunning enough also to try to hide himself while seeking his prey.

Between the shrubbery and the house is an open path, which he must cross, and Mrs. Hamblin, watching him unseen from behind a lace curtain, observes that he looks to the right and to the left cautiously, then makes a dart across the open space and hides in a bank of tall rhododendrons.

His movements alone are sufficient to excite suspicion, for no man hides himself and creeps up to the house like a serpent unless, like the angry reptile, he is prepared to use his deathly fangs.

That he means mischief the trainer's wife is now convinced. He is coming closer to the window, he thrusts his right hand into his breast-pocket and takes from it something that gleams in the sunlight.

The next instant he has placed his left hand upon the sill of the open window, preparatory to springing into the room, and she, acting on the impulse of the moment, pulls down the sash quickly, just as a flash of fire and the report of a pistol shot startle her and make Hetty spring to her side and, clinging to her in terror, look through the closed window at the scene that is being enacted within a few yards of them.

Jem Blake's revolver is lying on the gravel path, knocked out of his hand by the loaded head of the whip with which Lord Claude is now belaboring him.

His lordship had caught the fellow by the back of the neck as he recoiled in surprise at the window being closed in his face, and, having knocked the revolver from his grasp, he now lays the thin, stinging whip upon him with a will.

Jem is a little fellow, but he is strong and wiry, and he wriggles like an eel.

But Lord Claude holds him with a grasp that cannot be shaken off, and the struggles of the helpless wretch only expose his head and face and hands, as well as his legs and shoulders, to the swiftly descending lash.

For fully ten minutes Jem Blake's punishment continues.

At first he fights and struggles sullenly and in silence.

Then, as the cuts from the whip became keener and more stinging, and he realizes his own helplessness, he begins to whine and cry, like the cur that he is; to beg for mercy, and to vow that he will never do it again if his lordship will let him off this time.

The task of chastising a villain is fatiguing, and gradually the cuts from the whip become less frequent; not from compassion, but because Lord Claude is thoroughly exhausted with his unusual exertions.

It is not, however, until Hetty flings up the window-sash again, and, in evident distress at the sight of the fellow's sufferings, cries, "Do let him go, my lord! Don't strike him any more — don't, I pray of you!" that Jem Blake looks up with any hope of release.

But Lord Claude is savage that she should beg for mercy for the wretch who would have murdered her yesterday, and who has been caught in the act of attempting her life again to-day.

His blows had begun to flag; now they become quicker and more stinging, for the cries of the wretch have ceased, and he answers, sharply:

"I haven't done with him yet. I'll give him a lesson that he will not forget to the day of his death!"

And he continues the punishment with renewed vigor, the savage strain in his nature coming strongly to the surface and making him gloat over his worthless victim's sufferings.

"I cannot bear this! I will not bear it!" cries Hetty, excitedly. "He will kill him, mother! Do interfere; do stop this horrible scene!"

"You had better leave them alone!" says Mrs. Hamblin, turning away, unable to bear the sight any longer. "He meant to shoot one of us, and he richly deserves all that he gets."

But Hetty scarcely listens to her prudent words.

She has run through the hall into the garden, and is

now standing between Lord Claude and the wretch whom he is so severely chastising.

"Spare him, my lord! Spare him! You must stop; you shall not strike him any more!" She first entreats, then cries imperiously.

"No!" she adds, facing Lord Claude, and undaunted by the whip, which he raises in defiance of her assertion. If you strike again, you will strike me!"

Her determined attitude ends the painful scene.

The whip does not descend as intended. The arm that wields it is lowered, and a frown gathers over Lord Claude's handsome face, as he says, angrily:

"Hetty; you will live to repent this mistaken kindness! This fellow is a cur who must have all the spite whipped out of him to make him harmless."

"I don't believe it; there is good in him still," cries the girl, excitedly.

Then, turning to the lashed and almost senseless wretch, who has been so determined to end her own young life, she says, pitifully:

"Jem, do go away and be a good man. Try to forget the past, and start a new life in a new country. Forget me, and only remember that I always wished you well!"

"It's more than anybody else has done!" growls Jem, gloomily.

And, being released from Lord Claude's grip, he shuffles away, though he makes one lurch for the revolver that lies so temptingly near him.

Lord Claude springs upon him, however, before he can touch the weapon, and turns tauntingly to Hetty, and says:

"You see what a wretch you have befriended! He would shoot you down now as remorsely as I would kill a sparrow."

"I don't believe it, my lord," is the ready response; "and a sparrow values his life, I don't doubt, as much as

any human being. Let him go this time. I am not afraid of him."

"I feel very much more inclined to hand him over to the police," is the reply, "and let him take his trial for attempted murder."

"No, let him go now," pleads the girl.

"You won't do it again, will you, Jem?" she asks, turning to the quivering wretch who so little merits her intercession.

But he frowns and makes no answer, while Lord Claude says, exultingly:

"You see he will not promise! It is a question, in his mind, of your life or his."

"Still, let him go," pleads Hetty, earnestly. "I am not afraid of him," she adds, with simple faith. "Life is given to us from on High, and every plot against my life must fail, unless I am called by my Heavenly Father to resign it."

"I s'pose that's true," mutters Jem Blake, under his breath. "I've tried it twice and failed; I shan't try no more. But *he* is right, *he* has given me a lesson I'm not likely to forget!"

He grinds his teeth with impotent fury, as he thus meditates; but he makes no effort to release himself from the strong, muscular hand that holds him, and it is Hetty's voice that again intercedes in his favor as she pleads:

"Do let him go! He isn't really bad; and I cannot bear to see you striking him!"

"So be it!" replies his lordship, impatiently.

And he gives the fellow a jerk and a spin, flinging him to a short distance, as he might fling a cur that had snapped at him.

Jem Blake makes no sound, and utters no complaint, but limps away into the high-road as quickly as his pained limbs will carry him.

He is smarting terribly!

His head, face, neck, and arms are one mass of cuts and

bruises; he cannot move a limb or a muscle without exquisite torture.

But for all this, he is more wounded in spirit than in body; the remembrance that it was Hetty, whom he meant to kill, who interceded in his favor, who saved him from further punishment, who expressed her belief in his goodness of heart and in his powerlessness to do her harm, has a strange and humiliating effect upon him.

It is not in him to rise to her moral and intellectual level.

What to her is faith, in him becomes superstition, but the feeling is strong upon him, nevertheless, that he cannot harm her, that she bears a charmed life, that darts aimed against her must fail and plots prove futile, that she is as much beyond his reach as an angelic being of another sphere, and that, try as he will, he will never be able to reach her.

But toward Lord Claude Irongate his feeling are widely different.

He has felt his lordship's cruel grip upon his neck, has quivered under his still more cruel lash upon his limbs, and he vows, with a fearful oath, that for all that he has suffered this morning he will be fully and amply avenged.

But he is not the only person who desires to be avenged upon Lord Claude for wrongs inflicted upon himself, or upon another.

> "The mills of the gods grind slowly;
> But they grind exceeding small."

And Lord Claude pursues his way, conscious that a few men hate him — possibly not without cause — but quite indifferent to their feelings, and apprehending no danger to himself therefrom.

When Jem Blake is gone, he turns to Hetty, and says, in a tone of displeasure:

"You ought not to have interfered in this matter, my dear. The fellow deserved ten times more than he got."

"But you beat him cruelly — savagely!" expostulates Hetty.

"I ought to have given him in charge of the police," he retorts, angrily, "and I wish I had done so."

"You could scarcely thrash him yourself and give him over to the police afterward," she remarks, coldly. "But I am glad he is gone, and I hope I shall never see him again," she adds, with a little shiver.

"Yes, I think you have good cause to be afraid of him," says his lordship, taking her arm and leading her back into the house. "He is an ugly customer, and you will be safer to be out of his way for awhile."

"Yes, my lord, we leave here early to-morrow morning," says Mrs. Hamblin, who has just joined them, "and while we are away it might be as well if you were to set the police to look after Jem Blake. I meant to have kept his attempt upon Hetty's life yesterday a secret, but his behavior to-day proves that to be impossible."

"Perhaps so," is the reply; "but we will wait till he turns up again. We will let him off this time, but let him cross my path once more and he shall find no mercy."

"I hope he will not do so," says Hetty, with a shiver of pain; then she seats herself by the window and looks up the narrow drive which leads to the high-road.

She has been here for a few minutes, paying little heed to a discussion between her mother and Lord Claude as to the relative advantages and disadvantages of Walberswick as a temporary residence, when she sees a large open carriage, drawn by a pair of bays, and containing a lady, coming down the lane toward the house.

Her exclamation of surprise attracts the attention of her companions, both of whom come to the window and follow her gaze.

"Somebody coming here!" says Lord Claude, shortly, and in a tone indicative of anything but satisfaction.

"Yes; if it is Lady Daphne we won't see her," remarks

Mrs. Hamblin, resolutely. "She insulted me the last time she was here.

"It is not my sister; it is Lady Edward Tavenner," remarks his lordship, coldly.

He is surprised to see the faces of his companions change as he says this.

Hetty's cheeks become pale and red alternately; but Mrs. Hamblin's face is white as if blanched with a great terror, and she says, hurriedly:

"I cannot see her! I would not meet her for a hundred pounds! Hetty, you must speak to her alone, I am going to my own room; and, Lord Claude, please oblige me by not letting her see you. Oh, how I wish we had gone out of town to-day, so that I had escaped this ordeal!"

Then, clasping her hands in her agitation, she hastens to her own bedroom, where she locks herself in; while Lord Claude says, moodily:

"I suppose I must leave you, as I am requested to do so."

And he snatches up his hat and goes out by the way to the stables; while Hetty, with her heart beating wildly, her color coming and going in quick succession, and her eyes gleaming like twin stars, stands nervously awaiting the arrival of Gilbert Tavenner's mother.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Does Hetty Hamblin live here?" asks Lady Edward Tavenner, haughtily, when her footman's loud knock had brought Molly to the door.

"Yes, my lady; will you step inside, please, my lady?" replies Molly, bobbing and smiling in a familiar fashion, that makes the proud woman regard her with haughty displeasure.

For a second or two her ladyship makes no answer; her impulse is to say, coldly:

"No, tell her to come to me."

But prudence whispers in her ear that it will be well not to conduct this interview in the presence of servants, and she is curious, also, to see what this girl is like in her own home.

So, after remaining undecided for a few minutes, while Molly and the footman look at her proud face, the latter with patience, the former with wonder, she rises, and slowly descends from the open carriage, then with languid and stately steps she follows Molly into the sitting-room.

With one glance she takes in all her surroundings.

The cheap but pretty cretonne with which the curtains are made and the furniture is covered; the stained and polished floor, with a few mats lying about for use; the terra-cotta jars, the unframed pictures that adorn the walls, and the flowers which grow in ornamental pots, as well as the cut flowers that stand in colorless glasses of the cheapest description.

Nothing is pretentious here, nothing common or vulgar.

The room might belong to the wife of an artist or a clergyman; to one who was poor in this world's goods, but whose natural refinement and love of beauty overcame the circumstance of her poverty; or it might be the home of of one who was rich, but whose simple tastes were well expressed by her surroundings.

Lady Edward Tavenner is impressed by what she sees, though she did not come here to look upon anything with favor; and the girl who is standing in the middle of the room, waiting to receive her, only increases her surprise and dissatisfaction.

The agitating scene through which Hetty has so recently passed has left its traces upon her, in the glistening eyes, which the long, curling lashes cannot completely hide, in the fluctuating color on her cheeks, and the timid manner in which she waits to hear what Gilbert Tavenner's mother has to say to her.

She is unconsciously looking her very best, and the pale, blue cambric gown she wears is quite as becoming as though it were made of the most costly silk.

"Will your ladyship take a seat?" asks Hetty, timidly.

And Lady Edward, with stately condescension, accepts the proffered courtesy.

She has not come here, as Lady Daphne Irongate came, to dictate to the Hamblins, to humiliate and insult them; but it is more than doubtful if her feelings toward them are in the slightest degree more cordial.

Her experience of the world has been too varied for her to expect to ride rough-shod over everybody who opposes her, and she knows full well that, if you want to mold people to your will, you must enter into their thoughts, consider their prejudices, and influence them through their pride or their passions.

She has come now to inspect the ground before beginning mining operations, and her first impression is very unfavorable in so far as the probable success of her schemes are concerned.

For some time past she has heard of Hetty Hamblin; she had seen the portrait of her husband's charger, Nestor, which the girl had painted for her son, and she was present, it will be remembered, when that portrait was destroyed by Lady Daphne; and she had since heard something from Gilbert that has alarmed her far more than the rupture of his engagement with Lord Claude's sister.

But she has never seen Hetty before to-day; and she had pictured to herself a girl handsome and bold looking, striking and artistic to a certain extent, but coarse, despite her beauty; lacking in every sense the repose and refinement

"That marks the caste of Vere de Vere."

Hetty, however, does not come up to her anticipations in this respect.

She is not bold, nor loud, nor strikingly handsome. On

the contrary, she is quiet, refined, and exquisitely lovely; but her loveliness grows upon you! It is not glaringly apparent at once. At first you feel that you are in the presence of

> "A creature all too wise and good
> For human nature's daily food."

And though this impression gradually wears off, and you recognize that Hetty Hamblin is very human after all, the sanctity of innocence that surrounds her never fades.

Lady Edward Tavenner has no thought of being discourteous and unkind to Hetty.

As she finds her so much superior to anything she had anticipated, a feeling of genuine regret comes into her heart that the inequality of birth and rank make a marriage between her son and this girl a step not to be thought of as possible.

But she quickly drives such feelings from her mind; from her point of view such a match is impossible, and it is her business to make both Hetty and Gilbert feel that it is so.

"You had better sit down, likewise," she says to Hetty, in a tone she means to be gracious.

And, as the girl complies, she adds, courteously, though still with an arrogant ring in her voice:

"I want you to do something for me. You painted the portrait of a horse for my son a few weeks ago, and an accident has befallen the picture. I want another copy. I suppose there will be no difficulty about it?"

"When does your ladyship want it?" inquires Hetty, with apparent calmness.

Her face had flushed at the mention of "my son;" but she had kept her eyes steady, had not consciously moved a muscle, and she asks this question rather to accustom herself to the sound of her own voice than because she meditates painting the picture in a hurry.

"Oh, I don't know!" is the careless answer; "next week, or the week after, or the week after that."

"My mother and I are going to the seaside to-morrow," remarks Hetty, thoughtfully; "so that I am afraid it could not be done at once. And"—she adds, hesitating, and looking for sympathy in the eyes of her visitor—"I don't think I should be able to paint the same picture over again—in the same way."

"And why, pray?" is the cold and pitiless question.

"I don't quite know," replied the girl, hanging her head and playing nervously with a piece of thread she has picked up from the table. "I suppose it is because I am not a properly-trained artist," she continues.

"Please explain yourself," says her ladyship, sharply.

"I am very unequal in my work," says Hetty, feeling that she must try to make herself intelligible. "If I like a subject, and think I can paint it, I can usually do it pretty well; but I must *feel* that I can do it, and I don't feel that I can paint Nestor over again."

"That is very unfortunate," returns her ladyship, with a barely-repressed sneer. "I suppose you know how the original portrait came to be destroyed?"

"No; how did it happen?" asks Hetty, with such a frank and truthful expression in her clear eyes and upon her beautiful face that it is Lady Edward's turn to look confused, and she says sharply and evasively:

"It does not matter. I thought my son might have mentioned it to you."

"Oh, no!" replies Hetty, in such a tone that Lady Edward begins to wonder if she has become unnecessarily alarmed, and if there is really any danger to her son from this quarter.

But she feels that she must not show her motive for coming here too openly, and she says, in a more genial tone:

"Well, perhaps you will feel more inclined to paint the

picture I want when you come home from the seaside. By the way, can you paint dogs as well as horses ?"

"I don't know," replies Hetty, thoughtfully. "I used to think I could not, but I have been doing this recently ; it is not finished, as you will perceive."

And she turns a canvas, which has been standing with its face to the wall, so that the light falls upon it.

"That is a very creditable piece of work for one so young," says her ladyship, in genuine surprise.

Then she asks, suddenly :

"Would you like to go to London and study at the Royal Academy, if someone like myself would help you with money ?"

Hetty's face flushes.

Only a few weeks ago she would have jumped eagerly at this implied offer of help ; now she feels that there is danger in it — a danger which she cannot define, the very character of which is vague ; but her instinct warns her against it, and she replies, evasively :

"I should like to be well taught, but I could not leave my father and mother, nor should I care to study with a number of other people."

"In that case you are never likely to do much," says her ladyship, in a tone of disappointment ; "but I will give you a commission to paint my dog, Sophy, and you can execute it when you return from your trip."

"Thank you, my lady !" replies Hetty, nervously.

"To what part of the coast are you going ?" is Lady Edward's next question.

Hetty tells her, volunteering the information that she and her mother are going alone, for the sake of her health.

"Ah ! you don't look very strong," Lady Edward remarks, thoughtfully ; "and your hands are tied up ! My son told me something about your being injured yesterday by a ruffian who tried to throw you into the river."

"Yes, I should have been drowned if it had not been for

Mr. Tavenner," replies Hetty, warmly, and tears unbidden spring to her eyes as she speaks.

"Oh, he did nothing more for you than he would have done for any one else under the circumstances!" says the mother, coldly and haughtily. "It was the merest chance in the world that brought him to the spot; if I had not telegraphed, requesting him to come to me before he left England, he would probably have been where he is now—on his way to Paris."

Hetty is silent.

She would like to ask many questions; she does not dare to ask one.

Lady Edward's tone and manner show her very distinctly the social gulf that yawns between Gilbert and herself, a gulf which no effort on her part, no self-sacrifice, no amount of devotion will ever be able to span.

If it is ever bridged over, if they two may ever join hands from opposite sides of the gulf, it must be by his strong will and his all-conquering love, not by anything that she can do or say to help him.

But she does not anticipate it.

Lady Edward's tone and manner crush out even the faint glimmer of hope which Gilbert Tavenner's confession of love had kindled in her heart.

She loves him, and will love him to the end. She believes that he will keep the promise he voluntarily made, and will remain unmarried so long as she is single, and there is a hope of winning her. But, for all this, her heart sinks heavily in her breast; his mother's visit, for the time, has crushed all the spirit and hopefulness out of her.

"If you ever change your mind, and desire to live in London and study art, as cheaply and thoroughly as possible, you can apply to me and I shall probably be disposed to help you," says Lady Edward, in her haughty, arrogant manner, as she moves toward the door.

"Your ladyship is very kind," responds Hetty, with simple dignity.

"And let me know as soon as you return and wish to begin my dog's portrait."

"Yes, my lady."

"If it is not convenient for me to have you at the Hall, I can send Sophy over to you," continues Lady Edward, looking about her while she speaks, and seemingly unwilling to go.

Hetty bows her head, and her visitor, having no further excuse for remaining, walks out to her carriage, Hetty accompanying her.

"You have a pretty place here," says her ladyship, glancing around. "Almost too pretty!" she adds, *sotto voce.*

Then she steps into her carriage, bows with evident condescension to Hetty, and is driven away, unconscious that, while she is seating herself to her own satisfaction, a pale face at one of the upper windows is curiously and eagerly scanning her countenance.

Scarcely has the carriage gone a dozen paces from the door than Mrs. Hamblin, with singularly white face and agitated manner, leaves her room and joins her daughter.

"Why did she come? What did she want? Did she ask to see me?" she inquires, eagerly, question following question in rapid succession.

"She never mentioned your name, mother, dear; she never thought of you," says the girl, soothingly. "But I suppose you knew her in the days gone by, didn't you?"

"Never mind! We have met, and we shall never meet again if I can help it!" is the agitated answer.

"But tell me what she said to you," she continues, her usual calm self-possession overcome by her nervous anxiety.

Hetty repeats most of what has passed between Lady Edward Tavenner and herself, but, before she has finished, Mrs. Hamblin exclaims, bitterly:

"She wants to get you out of the way of her son! But

didn't you explain to her that she need be under no anxiety — that you are going to marry Lord Claude Irongate ?"

"Certainly not !" replies Hetty, with dignity. "I should have been much more likely to say that I shall never marry at all, if Lady Edward had not had too much good taste to talk to me on such a subject the first time we met !"

Then she hastens to her own room to weep bitter tears of pain and mortification at being thought unworthy of Gilbert's love by the one woman who can control his destiny.

On the plea of a headache, which is but too real, she avoids meeting Lord Claude again to-day. But he comes the next morning, just as she and her mother are about to step into the wagonette that is to take them to the railway station.

"Hetty, I must speak to you alone for a few minutes," he says, peremptorily.

And as the girl looks appealingly to her mother, the latter says, carelessly :

"Certainly, why not ? But you must not be long, or we shall lose our train."

Dreading, she knows not what, Hetty walks back into the sitting-room, and Lord Claude follows her.

A few minutes later she appears again, her cheeks red with anger and her eyes flashing with indignation.

She smiles mechanically as her father helps her into the wagonette. But she looks steadily away from Lord Claude, and she does not voluntarily give him her hand when he takes it to say "Good-by," and she withdraws it from his clasp as speedily as possible.

"What did Lord Claude want to say to you ?" her mother asks, a couple of hours later, when they are on their way to Suffolk.

"He threatened me !" replies Hetty, briefly.

Then mother and daughter relapse into silence, never dreaming that the journey they are now making is about to add another thread to the web of their destiny.

CHAPTER XXII.

HETTY and her mother have found lodgings in the cottage of a fisherman, close to the village green.

They have been in Walberswick three days only, but already the roses on Hetty's cheeks are taking a deeper hue, her fair skin is becoming sunburnt, her step is more buoyant than of old, for the keen, crisp, bracing northern air which blows in from the sea gives fresh life and energy to her frame, just as she was beginning to droop like a fair flower too long exposed to the glare of the noonday sun.

Mrs. Hamblin, too, is looking better for the change.

For the first time during the long years of her married life, she seems to cast off a portion of the burden which has weighed her down and made her shrink from contact with those who had once been her equals.

Mrs. Hamblin had not meant to make one single acquaintance during her absence from home, but, to carry out this intention, she should have gone to some crowded watering-place, not have settled herself in a quiet nook, where, on a second meeting at farthest, everybody spoke to everybody else with the same ease and freedom that you will find among the students in an art gallery.

There is but one street, and that is the most uninteresting part of the old village; but even here you will find an artist with his easel in the middle of the road, painting the wind-mill or copying a bit of the ruins of the fine old church, a small portion of which has been saved from the general wreck.

On the common, along the shore, on both banks of the river, there are artists dotted here and there, some under big white umbrellas, all of them earnestly at work painting the steep, red-tiled roofs of the quaint cottages, the rafters of the broken piers, the net-houses, the boats and the picturesque fishermen.

Some of the lady artists are very pretty, some are decidedly plain, but they are all industrious, and they talk to Hetty as though they had known her for months instead of their acquaintance dating from yesterday.

Mrs. Hamblin is vexed at this, but she cannot help it; circumstances are too strong for her.

Hitherto she has kept her daughter to herself, has never allowed her to have a friend of her own age and sex, but now she finds this extreme exclusiveness impossible.

When a girl artist looking up from her work smiles upon Hetty and asks, "Do you paint?" the latter can but answer, and though Mrs. Hamblin may walk on and seat herself in some boat or under the shelter of a net-house she cannot very well prevent Hetty from lingering behind and talking on a subject in which she is so greatly interested.

It is in vain that she cautions her daughter, saying:

"Don't make friends with any of these girls, Hetty. They are very nice to you now, because they think we are one of themselves, but when they discover what your father is, when they understand our true position, they will turn their backs upon you and forget to know you if by chance you meet."

"I think you misjudge them, mother; I am sure you do some of them, because I have heard one girl speak of her friends, who are poor, poorer than we are. But I am enjoying our stay here so much, and I am learning a great deal. It is like living another life to be with other girls who understand and sympathize with my feelings about my work."

Mrs. Hamblin turns away and sighs.

Hetty has made many acquaintances, but there is one between whom and herself a warm friendship has sprung up. This is Laura Mertonville, a name which the reader may recollect as having heard once before, in connection with a far less fortunate person in our story.

Although Hetty has only been here a few days, her life at Stanmoor seems like something in the far past. She lives

simply in the present, with the exception that Gilbert Tavenner seems nearer to her now than he has ever seemed before.

On this particular afternoon Hetty is wandering along the sands with Miss Mertonville.

Mrs. Hamblin, having been out all the morning, is now staying at home, and has allowed her daughter to go without her.

Laura Mertonville is a bright, intelligent girl, four or five years older than our heroine, by no means pretty, but pleasing and amiable, thereby securing a whole host of friends.

She has taken a great fancy to Hetty; she means to paint her portrait, and she is talking to her now rather to study her changeful countenance than from any great interest in the subject under discussion, when suddenly Hetty turns to look at a lady sitting before an easel, sketching a passing boat; Laura's eyes follow hers, and she exclaims, impulsively:

"Eugenie! Who would have thought of meeting you here?"

The saddened face of the girl, whom we first knew as Eugenie de Mæstro, flushes deeply.

For a second or two she seems to hesitate whether to turn away as a stranger, or respond to the greeting.

Her hesitation is but momentary, however; then she rises, and impulsively fling herself upon Laura's breast.

Hetty feels uncomfortable; she does not know whether to go away or remain where she is.

While she thus stands in doubt, Eugenie lifts her head, disengages herself from her friend's embrace, and says, with a deep-drawn sigh:

"Ah, I have been nigh unto death, and I am broken-hearted! To see you opens up all my wounds afresh, and yet I rejoice that we meet again."

"I am very sorry to see you like this," returns Laura Mertonville, kindly; "I have often wondered what became

She has taken his flowers, which are intended as a token that she will one day accept him.

of you that morning that you asked me to talk with your brother in the British Museum, while you went away without him. I heard he made a great scene at the gates, but why or wherefore I could never understand."

"Ah, would that I had never gone away as I went that day!" sighs Eugenie. "But regrets are useless; you shall know all another time, for here comes my brother, and I must not take you from your friend."

"Then you are staying in this place?" asks Laura, in surprise.

"Yes; Leon and I have taken that little cottage over there for a month. We only came yesterday, and he will not be with me much of the time. The woman to whom the house belongs waits upon us, and our life is most simple."

"You don't look well," says Laura, kindly.

Then she asks, in an undertone:

"Are you still afraid of your big brother?"

"Oh, no, he never scolds me now!" she answers, pathetically. "He has been gentle with me ever since my great trouble, when I so nearly died. But hush — I will tell you more another time."

Then, turning to her brother, who has now come up to them, she said, with a faint smile:

"Leon, you remember Miss Mertonville, don't you?"

The Mexican's face does not readily relax into a smile; he still resents the share which this girl had in helping his sister to escape from him. But he lifts his hat, and says gravely and without much cordiality:

"I do remember her."

"And do not forgive me!" asserts Laura, in a pained tone. "But really you have nothing to forgive, as Eugenie will tell you. She only said to me, when you and I last met, 'Talk to my brother for a few minutes,' and I did so. Of her intentions I was as ignorant then as I am now."

"It is true," assents Eugenie, sadly. "No one was to blame but myself."

"Forgive me if I wronged you," says the handsome Mexican, his countenance lighting up with a smile.

Then looking at Hetty, whose face had attracted him from the first, he asks, courteously:

"Your sister, I presume?"

"Oh, no; I have no sister," is the answer.

Then she introduces them —

"Miss Hamblin — Senor de Mæstro."

Hetty and Leon bow; then Eugenie gathers up her drawing materials and invites the two girls to come with her to their cottage and have afternoon tea.

Laura accepts at once, but Hetty feels that she is only asked out of politeness; she likewise doubts if her mother would approve of her accepting the hospitality of a stranger, and she says, timidly:

"I fear my mother will be alarmed if I do not return almost immediately."

"We can send a boy round to tell her where you are," volunteers Leon de Mæstro, with so much eagerness that Eugenie is surprised, never having seen him take so much interest in any girl before; and, being anxious to please him, she says, warmly:

"Oh, do please come; I will send to your mother if you wish it, and we will not keep you longer than you like to stay."

So Hetty is persuaded to join them, and thus the first link is forged in a chain of circumstances that must materially influence the destinies of many of those in whom we are interested.

The cottage in which Leon and his sister are living is no better than many of the other cottages in the place, though they pay a good rent for it.

One of the peculiarities of the siting-room is that the front door opens into it, but Eugenie has adorned the walls

with some of her sketches, has scattered pretty trifles about, such as many women can scarcely live without, and Leon has succeeded in hiring a piano, so that the little place, though humble, is home-like.

A settled melancholy has come over Eugenie Trevor since we last saw her.

In that fight with death in which we left her, the doctors had at length conquered, but she came back to life to find all that made life worth living gone from her — through no fault of her own, gone from her beyond recall!

At first she would not believe that her husband had given her the poison that so nearly killed her, and even when the bottle which had contained it was found in her workstand she was still incredulous.

But his continued absence, his mysterious silence, and the precautions he had evidently taken to baffle pursuit and to make inquiries useless, all told upon the poor girl's weakened frame, and when her child was prematurely born and her last hope of comfort and of having something dearer than herself to love had departed, she drifted again so near to the borderland of death that for a time the doctors despaired of her recovery.

Her naturally strong constitution triumphed at last, and her brother has left her house in the charge of a policeman and his wife and has brought her here, hoping that change of scene and some occupation may distract her thoughts and keep her mind from brooding over her great sorrows.

She tries to cast off her gloom in the presence of Laura and Hetty, and she is agreeably surprised to observe how bright and animated her brother has become, and how attentive he is to the the fair English girl, who seems to be a little afraid of his admiration.

Hetty's beauty had struck her at the first glance, and the longer she looks upon her sweet face the more it grows upon her, and she feels a singular desire to take her portrait.

It is the first earnest wish she has had since the total wreck of her happiness took from her the enjoyment of life.

Something of this she implies when she asks Hetty if she will sit to her, and Leon seconds the request so earnestly that Hetty cannot refuse, but answers that she will do so with pleasure if her mother makes no objection.

"We will call and ask your mother to-morrow," says Leon, quickly.

And when Hetty says she really must go, he politely insists upon accompanying her to her own door.

Mrs. Hamblin is vexed when Hetty tells her of the new acquaintances she has made.

She has a dread of strangers.

Though she would not say so to Hetty, she fears that these people may regard herself and her daughter as adventuresses, as living under false pretenses, when they discover that, instead of being in a position like themselves, they are but the wife and daughter of a trainer of horses — of one who, when she married him, was her own groom.

Of the folly of that mad step she has repented daily, never more so, perhaps, than now, when her surroundings least remind her of her own social downfall.

But things done cannot be undone.

And, despite Mrs. Hamblin's reserve and coldness, despite the manner in which she strives to repel all friendliness, Hetty is irresistibly drawn into daily companionship with Laura Mertonville and with Eugenie and her brother.

Though it is now but the end of September, the air is keen and boisterous in exposed places, and Hetty, with Laura and Eugenie, who are both sketching her, will sit among the rafters of the tumble-down pier, while the two artists work away industriously.

Meanwhile Leon de Mæstro will be smoking at a little distance, pretending to read, though often, if the truth were known, holding his book upside down; and Mrs. Hamblin, with an open book on her knee and some needle-

work in her hands, is alternately dreaming and watching the group before her.

For the sake of continuing her acquaintance with Hetty Eugenie has tried to ingratiate herself in the good-will of Mrs. Hamblin, but her efforts have not been crowned with success.

Hetty's mother is coldly polite and courteous, but she is nothing more; she submits to follow her daughter rather than let her go out of her sight.

But she will neither give nor receive any confidence; and though she has understood from Hetty, who has been told by Laura, that Eugenie's husband has deserted her, she will not relax her freezing manner toward the unhappy girl.

She is secretly also a little afraid of Leon de Mæstro.

His admiration for Hetty is apparent in his countenance, she fears he may put it into words; and though she does not for a moment suppose that her daughter will be influenced by his love, she is by no means satisfied that Leon will be silenced by the first "no," but fears that he may follow them to Stanmoor and ascertain their true position.

Under these circumstances, much as she enjoys the keen, fresh air and the quiet beauty of the scene around her, she is eagerly counting the days as they pass by, wishing they would go still faster; and so the time drifts on, until there are only two more left before they must return.

Mrs. Hamblin is at the window of their small sitting-room, that looks out on the village green.

Her dress is dark and neat as usual; her once handsome face is deeply lined with care and vain regrets, rather than with age. But she looks every inch a lady; nothing can take from her the indications of gentle birth and the refinement that is the result of generations of culture.

She is going to join Hetty on the pier presently; but she does not care for being so much out of doors as does her daughter, and the latter was called for by Laura and Eugenie a full hour ago.

As the hour of their departure is coming nearer, Mrs. Hamblin is growing weary of following her daughter and her friends, and this morning she is reading a newspaper that the postman has just brought, and is indulging in a comfortable sensation of rest.

No presage of coming evil is upon her. To her mental vision the sky is as blue and clear as it has been for many a long day; and when, with the consciousness that a pair of eyes are fixed upon her, she looks up and perceives Lord Claude outside the garden gate, she smiles, thinking to herself:

"He could not live any longer without seeing Hetty."

But Lord Claude's face is grave and sad as she opens the door to him, and scarcely has he entered the sitting-room before he says, dolefully:

"I am the bearer of bad news, Mrs. Hamblin."

"Bad news!" she repeats, looking at him in dismay. "What news can be bad to me?"

Then a trembling seizes upon her, and she cries wildly:

"He isn't dead—don't tell me that he is dead! I have wished it so long, that I shall feel that my wishes have helped to kill him."

"You could not feel like that to your own son," says his lordship, almost sternly.

"My son!" she cries, gazing at him in amazement. "What, Chris?"

"Yes, poor Chris," replies Lord Claude, sadly; "he met with an accident, he fell from a horse, he is"——

"He is dead!" gasps the mother, slowly.

Then, with a cry of self-reproach, she adds:

"And I never loved him as I ought to have loved him."

She buries her face in her hands.

Such grief as hers is worse to bear than that of a mother who has been ready to give her life for her child.

The remorse for having starved her child for lack of love

is almost greater than it would have been had she starved him for lack of bread.

"I promised Hamblin that I would bring you home to-day," says Lord Claude, looking round the small room; then he asks, sternly:

"Where is Hetty?"

"On the pier with her friends," replies the agonized mother; "fetch her and tell her — I cannot."

And Lord Claude, without a moment's hesitation, seizes his hat and starts off for the pier to seek Hetty, little dreaming of another whom he will certainly find there.

CHAPTER XXIII.

UNDER the rafters of the old pier — rafters thick as the trunk of a full-grown tree, worm-eaten and worn by each returning tide — Eugenie Trevor is sitting before her easel.

But she is not painting.

The portrait of Hetty Hamblin, in an unfinished condition, is on the canvas; but she is not regarding it.

Her eyes are looking through the network of huge piles and rafters, upon which the pier is built, to the white-crested waves which are rolling in toward the shore.

The tide is low, and the spot upon which she sits will not be covered for another hour; but she is not thinking of possible danger, her mind has wandered back into the past, and her memory lingers lovingly over the brief days of her honeymoon.

Presently her feelings become too intense to be repressed, they must find expression in words; she closes her eyes, clasps her hands, and murmurs, brokenly:

"I would give my life freely, gladly, to live through such a perfect month of bliss again!"

She has been left here at her own request by Hetty and Laura, and she has promised to join them close to the ferry

very shortly, to meet her brother, who is to take her over to Southwold.

But she has forgotten her promise, and forgotten them; her thoughts have gone back to the happiness that was so brief as to be like a dream; even the cruel awakening is obliterated for the time from her memory, and the agonized entreaty escapes her lips:

"Laurence, my husband! Come back to me! Oh, come!"

The splash and moan of the sea answer her, but Laurence Trevor does not respond to the call; and presently she rouses herself, wrings her hands helplessly, breathes a deep-drawn sigh, takes up the burden of life again from whence she had dropped it half-an-hour ago, and, rising slowly, prepares to get out from under the pier.

While she is doing this she hears the sound of footsteps overhead, but they tell her nothing; and it is not until she has ascended the wooden steps which lead to the top of the pier that she sees a gentleman, with his back toward her, walking in the direction of the sea.

Something in his figure, something in his gait, and in the glitter of his golden hair, as the sunlight falls upon it, makes her heart bound with sudden joy.

It is her husband; she could swear it!

He has reached the extreme end of the pier; he is seeking some one.

Her heart leaps with ecstacy. Her prayer is answered; he is looking for her, of course.

All his neglect is forgotten at this moment. She scouts with indignation the idea that it was he who attempted her life.

He has been to their home, has found her absent, has followed her, and she is ready to fling herself upon his breast, to receive him back with all her old love and confidence, and never utter one word of reproach for what she had believed to be his cruel desertion.

Her impulse is to hasten to him; to say, ere he can speak:

"My husband — my beloved one! Leave me no more, I pray you, or I shall die!"

But her limbs refuse their office.

She tries to take a step forward, and nearly falls.

The things she holds in her hands drop from them, and she has to lean against the wood-work for support.

A feeling of faintness comes over her, but she will not faint.

She has heard him speak with contempt of women who have no control over their emotions, of those who weep, and faint and fall into hysterics on the slightest provocation; and she struggles, as one might struggle for life, to gain the mastery over her own weakness.

And she succeeds.

But her muscles are hard set with the struggle; her face is white to the very lips, and her black eyes seem to burn with the intensity of feeling which she fights so hard to repress.

The man whom she is watching has turned, and is coming toward her.

If she were less agitated she would perceive that, as he approaches, he pauses once, looks to the right and to the left, possibly for some means of turning aside and of avoiding the meeting for which she is waiting.

But there are no steps beyond the flight at the top of which she is standing, and after that slight pause he comes on carelessly and slowly, as though he had no greater interest in life than to observe the salt marshes and the quaint, rather than striking, scenery about him.

A cold perspiration bathes Eugenie's face and head; her heart beats wildly with an undefined dread.

Scarcely knowing what she does in her agitation, and only conscious that she wants air, that her feelings are strung to such a pitch that they almost choke her, she takes

off her large-brimmed hat, and stands waiting, bare-headed, for him to address her.

As he comes close, she can scarcely control the impulse to spring forward, fling herself upon his breast, and sob out her joy and her rapture at being with him once more.

But something in his pale, sternly-set face and composed manner restrain her.

The glance of his eye as he looks casually at her freezes the blood in her veins.

He regards her as a stranger; he is actually passing her without one word, one glance of recognition, when her agony breaks forth into speech, and she cries, frantically:

"Laurence! My husband! Won't you speak to me?"

"I beg your pardon, madam," replies Lord Claude Irongate, for it is he, pausing in his walk and regarding the excited, almost maniacal-looking woman in surprise. "Did you speak to me?"

"Speak!" she replies, goaded by what seems to her like heartlessness. "Yes, I do speak! I call you husband! But why do you look at me like this? Do you wonder to find me still living?"

"Pardon me, madam, but you are laboring under some extraordinary delusion," he replies, coldly. "I have not the pleasure of knowing you!"

"You don't know me?" she repeats, amazed at his assertion.

"I have told you already that I do not," he answers, sternly.

"Am I not your wife?" she demands, her eyes blazing, her hands extended, her whole attitude eloquent with underlying menace and piteous entreaty.

But Lord Claude is cold and pitiless as a keen-edged sword, and he says, disdainfully:

"No; that you certainly are not!"

She clasps her head with both hands, wildly; her brain reels; if it were not for the wood-work of the pier against

which she leans, she would fall; and he, careless of her sufferings, would pursue his way, if she did not cry after him:

"Stop! One word more. Are you not Laurence Trevor?"

"No, I am not!" he answers, savagely.

"But I can swear to you!" she asserts, frantically.

"You can swear to anything you like!" he retorts, contemptuously.

And he quickens his pace, never once turning to look at the agonized woman who tears her hair and rends her garments, as she moans, in broken accents:

"I shall go mad! I shall go mad! The burden of my life is greater than I can bear!"

She staggers to the opposite side of the pier, by which the river runs into the sea.

What her intention is she scarcely knows herself, except that she feels:

> "Mad from life's history,
> Glad to death's mystery,
> Swift to be hurled;
> Anywhere, anywhere, out of the world."

But the tide runs low, the mouth of the river is silted up with sand, and if she were now to throw herself over this side of the pier she would fall into a bed of sand and mud rather than into deep water.

The effort to come thus far and the mad resolve to end her miserable life have exhausted her.

She might, had death and release seemed possible, have been able to precipitate herself over the low barrier; but the uselessness of such an attempt is but another drop of agony to her overcharged heart and maddened brain, and, with a low moan, she sinks down in a swoon, even the torture of suffering, for the time, suspended.

Here her brother finds her, some twenty minutes after she falls.

He, also, is greatly excited, though he knows nothing of

the scene which has crushed out the last glimmer of hope from his sister's heart.

It will be remembered that Laurence Trevor is personally unknown to him, that he and the man who married his sister have never met, though Laurence had taken a good look at Leon from behind a statue in one of the sculpture galleries of the British Museum.

But although Leon has not known the man whom he considers a monster in human shape, he has heard him described but too often.

His golden hair, his dark blue eyes, his long, drooping mustache, his height, his build, have all been pictured to him ; and although Eugenie had no photograph of her husband, she has painted his portrait again and again, until Leon has grown tired of seeing it.

And this face, that has become so familiar to him, he believes he has seen about ten minutes ago.

So sure is he of this that had the man been alone he would have addressed him.

But he was not alone ; he was walking with Hetty Hamblin, talking to her earnestly, with a lover-like air, that set the proud Mexican's heart on fire with jealousy.

Hetty's eyes were downcast, her cheeks were pale, she might just have heard of some great calamity, for never had he seen such an expression of sorrow on her beautiful countenance.

Even as he watches her, she lifts her eyes ; they are suffused with tears, which she takes a handkerchief to wipe away, and thus she passes on, without so much as a glance or a bow of recognition.

Under these circumstances Leon cannot address her or her companion ; but he feels that he hates the latter with deadly hatred, and, conquering his impulse to turn and follow the couple, he hastens to seek his sister, and bring her to confront this fair-haired stranger.

He does not perceive her as he looks toward the pier, and

he makes his way by the sands to the spot where Eugenie had been left.

On the ground he finds a white handkerchief, which he picks up and recognizes as hers, and he wonders, with a vague sense of uneasiness, whither she can have gone.

As she is not here, he must seek her elsewhere, and he ascends the wooden steps and gets onto the pier.

Probably he would not find her now, if he did not stumble over something which makes him look down, and he finds his sister's brushes and canvas and paint-box, and the pieces of wood in a strap which, when screwed together, form her easel.

Looking anxiously about for the owner of these things, he suddenly observes a heap of black clothing on the opposite side of the disused pier.

To hasten to the side of this shapeless mass, to find the face of the woman and recognize his sister, is but the work of a few seconds.

His first impression on looking at her pallid countenance is that she is dead. But presently he discovers faint signs of life, and he hastens to some net-houses by the side of the river and entreats a couple of strong fisherman to come to his assistance.

They dash water upon Eugenie's face, and rub the palms of her hands, and presently she open her eyes and looks at the faces of those who are bending over her.

But the face she seeks is not there, and the heavy eyelids close wearily. But whether in sleep or in a swoon, those about her can scarcely tell.

"We must get her home," says Leon de Mæstro, gloomily.

And the fishermen fetch the sail of a boat and a couple of poles; make a kind of hammock, and upon this Eugenie is taken back to the cottage in which she and her brother reside.

Meanwhile, a doctor has been sent for from Southwold,

and, though she poor girl has partly regained consciousness, she appears to be in such a critical condition that Leon dare not leave her, though he is burning with impatience to seek the man whom he had seen walking with Hetty Hamblin, the man whom he believes to be the destroyer of his sister's happiness.

But the doctor comes at last, and after awhile he succeeds in rousing Eugenie from the torpor which had come over her.

It is a cruel kindness, as Leon realizes, for the first words she utters when they are alone reveal to him some of the agony of mind she must suffer.

"I have seen him," she moans, clasping her hands in despair; "and he denied himself to me, repudiated me! Said that he did not know me! That his name is not Laurence Trevor! That — that I am no wife of his!"

"And you recognized him?" asks her brother, keeping down his own boiling wrath. "You are sure you knew him, sure that you could not be mistaken?"

"Have I not been pillowed to his bosom? Have I not twined my fingers in his golden curls? Do I not know every line on his face, every tone in his voice? But no, no! I had rather he had killed me to-day than had looked so coldly at me with his cruel eyes, before he had spoken such false and wicked words with his treacherous tongue!"

She covers her face with her hands as she finishes speaking, and for a few seconds there is silence between them, broken at length by Leon, asking in a strangely calm tone:

"Well, and what do you mean to do?"

"What can I do?" she asks, looking at him helplessly.

"Many things," he replies, quietly. "You can authorize me to find him and bring him to justice."

"You would have no mercy upon him!" she says, fearfully.

"I would show him as much mercy as he has shown

you," he replies, with a contraction of the muscles of the face that makes her close her eyes and moan :

"I love him ! I don't want to hurt him. I love him ! "

"Most women would hate him ! " he replies, disdainfully. "Few would leave him to sun himself in the smiles of another woman, to give her the love he has ceased to feel for you."

Her breath comes quick and fast, she fairly pants with excitement ; while her eyes gleam with the fires of hate as she asks, in a low, intense tone :

"Another woman? What mean you? Quick ! tell me, or I shall go mad ! "

"This," says her brother, looking at her curiously, "I met the man you have described to me, whose face you have so often sketched. He was walking with Hetty Hamblin ; he was whispering words of love in her ears, looking as though he could not turn his eyes from feeding on her beauty ! "

"And she? " Eugenie asks, breathlessly.

"She was listening to him," replies Leon, gloomily. "She knew him well, this was not their first meeting. I had turned and followed them, but I sought you to confirm my suspicions, to come with me and confront him, and I have been chained to your side from that hour to this."

His sister scarcely heeds him, but mutters, slowly :

"Hetty Hamblin ! It cannot, must not be ! Fetch her, Leon ! Tell her I want her ; bring her with you. Lose no more time, but go ! "

And her brother, nothing loth, obeys.

But when he reaches the cottage in which the Hamblins have lived he finds they are gone away, and no one can tell him whither.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE story which Lord Claude had come to Walberswick to tell is but too true — Chris Hamblin is dead.

To Hetty the calamity is one of simple grief. She loved her brother, although their tastes and pursuits were so widely different; and he on his part, poor fellow, had regarded her with pride and admiration, as being so much like their mother, and, therefore, so much superior to himself.

But it is Mrs. Hamblin who seems to feel the blow most keenly.

Conscience whispers in her heart that she did not love her son while he lived as she ought to have loved him, and she reproaches herself extravagantly, while she likewise feels that a strong arm upon which she could lean in time of trouble has departed from her.

Any one acquainted with the Hamblin's, and who saw how little Chris was appreciated or considered by his mother, would reasonably wonder at the sense of desolation that has come over her with his death.

But, in truth, the death of his son has removed a certain amount of restraint from Joe Hamblin, and, while he mourns for him with a genuine grief, he does so in company of a glass and a bottle, which are both refilled as soon as they are empty.

An over-fondness for strong drink has always been Joe Hamblin's besetting sin, but the influence of his son had made him put some restraint upon himself, and now this is withdrawn he throws off all disguise.

To drown his grief he muddles his brain, and, to the infinite disgust of his wife, he is not sober even on the day of the funeral.

With one of their natural protectors gone, and the other rapidly drinking himself into his grave, Mrs. Hamblin

soon feels it necessary to take some decided step to assure herself and her daughter from impending distitution.

She has given up trying to control her husband; drink he will have.

If left alone with his bottle he is quiet and tractable enough, but when this is taken from him, and he is thwarted, he becomes insanely violent; and his wife loves him too little to try to save him against his will and at such a cost to herself.

But as soon as the keen edge of her grief for the loss of her son has worn away, and while the mold is still fresh upon his grave, Mrs. Hamblin resolutely faces her position, and decides that something must be done, and done quickly, if she would save herself and her daughter from a most unpleasant position.

What this "something" is there can be no difficulty in surmising.

Promises are easy things to make, and may be made at the time with the intention of being kept; but circumstances will soon override all such trifling considerations as being bound by a promise, and Mrs. Hamblin reasons with herself in such a specious way that she is soon convinced she will be fully justified in breaking her promise to her daughter.

Her promise was that Hetty should not be pressed to marry any one until she is eighteen, and the girl will not be seventeen until the tenth of next month.

But only Hetty's speedy marriage can save her mother and herself from extreme poverty.

Of this Mrs. Hamblin is but too sure, and, reluctant as she is to withdraw her promise and drive her daughter to take a step so repugnant to her feelings, she can see no other means of social salvation open to them.

Hetty is one of those few girls whose beauty does not spoil with weeping, otherwise Lord Claude might not be so urgent as he is for a speedy marriage.

The girl's health seems to have been greatly improved by her visit to the seaside; faint roses now bloom upon her cheeks, and though her eyes are sometimes heavy with weeping, they lose none of their loveliness by the pathetic expression they give to her face.

Her mourning makes her look less childish and more womanly.

She has grown taller, her form has become more fully developed, and Lord Claude seems justified by appearances when he asserts that it is preposterous to say she is too young to marry.

Little dreaming of the pressure so soon to be brought upon her, Hetty tries to occupy her mind with her painting, as soon as she can withdraw it from thoughts of poor Chris; and, feeling that money may soon be needed by herself and her mother, she writes a little note to Lady Edward Tavenner, in which she informs her of her return home, and expresses her readiness to paint the portrait of Sophy.

So the dog's portrait is begun, her ladyship watching its progress critically, watching the girl who is painting it still more closely.

Lady Edward Tavenner has many prejudices, but she prides herself upon her sense of justice, and Hetty soon wins her unwilling admiration for the talent and industry which she brings to her work.

But her ladyship does not express these feelings; she keeps Hetty at a distance whenever they meet, and Gilbert's name is never mentioned between them.

Thus matters stand two months after their return from the seaside.

Hetty's efforts to restrain her father from his besetting sin are unavailing; his work is either neglected or is performed by others, and if Lord Claude were not a most indulgent master he would be dismissed from his situation, and his wife and daughter be cast homeless and penniless upon the world.

It was late in September when Hetty and her mother were at Walberswick; it is now the end of November, and nature has changed her garb from the rich, ruddy tints of autumn to the cold, gray hues of early winter.

The gardens of Stanmoor are no longer clad with verdure or bright with flowers; and when Hetty, for the sake of fresh air, walks under the bare branches of the leafless trees, the shrieking and soughing of the wind fill her soul with strange, unearthly terrors.

They seem to be moaning over the days that are fled — over the bright, sunny days when she dreamed her dream of love, of that day in particular when Gilbert Tavenner told her he loved her.

Well may the wild wind moan; the dream is but a dream!

Gilbert Tavenner is in a foreign country, divided from her by sea and land; her father is a drunkard, hourly becoming more besotted by indulgence in his favorite vice; and her mother is daily yielding to the bad influence of one who poses as a benefactor for the sake of compelling an unwilling girl to become his bride.

It is after one of these solitary strolls upon the wind-swept paths, and under the overhanging branches of the leafless trees, that Hetty, on returning to the house, finds Lord Claude Irongate in the sitting-room with her mother.

Her father but rarely comes into this room now; he has a den of his own in another part of the building, and there, when not pretending to work, he spends most of his time.

Hetty's reception of his lordship is courteous, but calm and indifferent as usual; she is indeed vexed to find him here, but she can say nothing. She knows that their fate is in his hands, and struggle as she has struggled to free herself and hers from his influence all her efforts have been futile.

It was due to his influence over her mother that she was not allowed to say good-by to her friends at Walberswick before leaving the place so suddenly; and it is equally in

consequence of his representations that Hetty has been strictly enjoined not to write to any of them.

"They must never know that we hold this humble position," says Mrs. Hamblin, proudly. "When you are married and live in a large house you will be able to invite them to come and see you. Now it is impossible, and they would not come if it were.

Hetty sighs, but obeys, and thus she knows nothing of Eugenie's illness — nothing of Leon de Mæstro's efforts to find herself.

Poor Hetty is beginning to feel that circumstances are too strong for her; she feels like a tired swimmer whose limbs are becoming powerless to stem a strong current and upon whom the conviction is forcing itself that further struggle is useless and he must be swept away by the stream or sink under its hurrying waters.

Her brother's death and the condition of her father — a condition that is worse than death — has left her helpless in the hands of her mother; and, although, to do Mrs. Hamblin justice, she would willingly make any and every sacrifice for the good of her daughter, she believes that this marriage will be for her daughter's welfare, and for this reason she has set her heart upon its accomplishment.

Lord Claude is very considerate and tender this afternoon; he has learned that Hetty takes alarm when he talks of love, and lately he has implied rather than spoken of his devotion.

But he has begun to give substantial proof of it in the way of presents.

At first Hetty would accept nothing more costly than flowers, and she had, it will be remembered, insisted that Lord Claude should not pay the expenses of that visit to the seaside.

But the death of her brother had taken away the principal bread-winner; money was constantly being required for some purpose or other, and, though the money did not

come into the girl's own hands, she knew, from her mother's remarks about Lord Claude's liberality, that it is he who has paid all demands, and that it is he who directly or indirectly supplies the delicacies that appear on their table.

Personal presents she has hitherto declined, but this afternoon, when she comes in, her hair wind-blown in unusual confusion, and, after greeting his lordship, seats herself sadly near the window, her mother says, brightly:

"Look here, Hetty; see what Lord Claude has brought for you."

As she speaks she holds out a small case, which can contain nothing larger than a ring, and opens it.

The flash of diamonds meets the girl's shrinking gaze. and she says, hurriedly and painfully:

"I don't want any presents, thank you ; I would rather not have it. I — I don't like rings."

"Nonsense ! " says her mother, with sudden severity; and she closes the little case with a snap and leaves it on the table by her own side.

Then she adds, sharply:

"Go and take off your hat, but don't stay long."

And Hetty promptly leaves the room; but when she reaches the seclusion of her own chamber she flings her arms above her head and falls upon her knees, entreating heaven to save her from a fate which seems to her more terrible than death.

When she returns to the sitting-room again Lord Claude is about to take his departure, and she feels so relieved at this that she stands mute as a stock or a stone, while he clasps his arm round her slender waist and kisses her.

So surprised is he at her unusual submission that he would repeat the caress, despite the presence of her mother, if the living statue did not become suddenly animated and recoil from him as though his touch were loathsome to her.

To cover his annoyance Lord Claude laughs and says, lightly:

"Never mind, Hetty. You will want to kiss me one day."

Then he goes away, Mrs. Hamblin following him to the door.

When her mother returns Hetty knows from the expression of her face that she has come to some disagreeable resolution. She observes, too, that the ring-case remains upon the table, and she fears for the moment that she will be made to wear the gem it contains.

Her worst anticipations, however, do not come up to the dread reality, for after turning over her work-basket for a few minutes Mrs. Hamblin says, quietly:

"Hetty, Lord Claude and I have arranged that you and he shall be married this day three weeks hence."

"Married!" cries the girl, springing to her feet in amazement; "married, mother?"

"Yes, married!" is the emphatic reply.

"But your promise, mother! You promised me if I would receive Lord Claude as a friend that I should not be pressed to marry him or any one until I am eighteen."

"Yes, I know; and I am sorry to break my word, but I cannot help it," replies the mother, sadly but resolutely.

"When I made that promise," she continues, "Chris was alive, and your father had not become such a senseless brute as he is now; had it been possible to keep that promise I would do so, but it is not — nothing but your marriage with Lord Claude can save us from the workhouse."

"I would rather go to the workhouse!" cries Hetty, excitedly. "No, I would ten thousand times rather die!" she moans, clasping her hands, piteously.

Mrs. Hamblin turns away her head.

Her daughter's agony pains her greatly, but she has steeled herself against this opposition, and is resolved to overcome it.

After a momentary pause, she says, bitterly:

"You are like the rest of the world, Hetty; you think

only of yourself, you don't care in the least what becomes of your father and me."

"Indeed, mother, you wrong me," replies the anguished girl, clasping her hands tightly, the better to restrain her emotions. "I will work hard for you and father, I will devote my life to serving you; there is no labor that I will shirk, no pain or suffering that I will not bear; but I cannot — I will not marry Lord Claude! I dislike him — I distrust him! he is false and mean by nature, and all his generosity is only put on for a purpose, and that purpose is a desplicable one — he has only made up his mind to win me because I will not be won."

"And you, out of sheer perversity, have tried to persuade yourself that you are in love with Gilbert Tavenner," sneers Mrs. Hamblin, angrily.

Hetty is silent for a few seconds, her cheeks, which have become pale with excitement, slightly flush; she hesitates.

Then, feeling that she must speak now or never, she says steadily, though timidly:

"Mr. Tavenner loves me. As soon as his mother's consent is gained he will make me his wife; and while I am free, he will never marry — he has told me so."

"His mother never will consent to such a union," says Mrs. Hamblin, with flashing eyes and firmly-compressed lips; "and if she did, I would not."

"You would refuse?" asks Hetty, in amazement.

"Yes, I would forbid it!" is the strange assertion.

"But why?" persists the girl, surprise for the moment overcoming every other feeling.

"Lady Edward Tavenner once did me a great wrong," is the evasive reply; "but for her my life would have been widely different. But enough of this — no amount of talking can alter my decision. The sooner you put all thought of Gilbert Tavenner out of your mind the better for your own comfort. In any case you will marry Lord

Claude this day three weeks; you can wear this ring in the interval or not as you like."

"I shall never willingly wear that or anything else that he can give me," Hetty answers, steadily and sadly.

Then, as her mother makes no answer, she flings herself upon her knees by her side, and pleads with agonizing entreaty:

"Mother have mercy upon me! Spare me and save me!"

But her mother — fearing her own resolution perhaps — rises to her feet, shakes the clinging hands free from her garments, and says, coldly:

"When you express your willingness to obey me, I will do anything in my power to please you!"

Then she walks out of the room, and Hetty, overcome with grief and despair, falls forward upon the ground, moaning in her grief that her mether should thus turn against her, should thus try to compel her to become the wife of a man against whom her very soul revolts.

CHAPTER XXV.

Hetty is greatly depressed her heart is torn with conflicting emotions, and she knows not where to look for succor, nor what step to take to save her from her impending doom.

Her mother is more resolute than she has ever known her to be before, her father has become too much the slave of the demon alcohol to be able to help her, and the one appeal she makes to him produces such a fit of frenzy that, for a brief space of time, Mrs. Hamblin's life is in danger.

Warned by this experience, Hetty makes no further effort to seek help from any one.

She feels that it is useless.

Save for her parents, she is singularly alone in the world.

Relatives, she seems to have none; and her mother has

always discouraged anything like friendship between her daughter and other girls of her age.

More than once during this miserable time the temptation comes to Hetty to disobey her mother's commands, to write to Laura Mertonville and ask her if she will help her to earn a livelihood if she secretly leaves her home to escape this hateful marriage.

But the habit of obedience is still strong upon her.

She loves her mother dearly.

The idea of putting herself in open rebellion to her is harrowing to her feelings ; it pains her even to see the cold, hard expression that has settled upon her parent's face, and she feels that she would gladly make any other sacrifice to bring back again the loving smile that always used to greet her.

But to marry a man whom she abhors — to leave her father and mother, to give herself to him, to be with him always !

The thought curdles the blood in her veins, rouses a wild desperation in her heart, so that she sometimes cries aloud, in bitterness :

"Oh, Gilbert ! why did you save me ? Better that Jem Blake had cast me into the river than that I should have lived for such a fate as this ! "

More than once during these dreadful days the thought of suicide presents itself to her mind.

"Of what use is her life?" the demon of Despair whispers in her heart. "There is nothing but infinite pain and misery before her."

But she does not yield to the tempter ; she spends much of her time in prayer, and her mother, who watches her silently, and who is often near when Hetty believes herself to be alone, observes the struggle that is going on in her daughter's heart, and feels convinced that, when the time comes, she will be passive and plastic as clay in her hands.

Mrs. Hamblin does not delight in her child's unhap-

piness — she would give much to spare her pain, but their desperate condition is aggravated in her own mind by Hetty's assertion that she and Gilbert Tavenner are only waiting for his mother's consent to their marriage, and she is resolutely determined to make that consent useless, if it is ever given.

So the days go by — long, miserable days, in which the sun does not shine, the rain falls in torrents; the river is flooded, and the country roads and lanes are so deep in mud that in some places they are almost impassable.

Preparations for Hetty's wedding have been going on outside the house, but she has taken no part in them.

She has refused to wear the diamond ring that Lord Claude had left for her, and she has turned coldly away when he has brought other jewelry as presents.

More than once she has meditated making an appeal to his feelings, to his self-pride, to his sense of honor, to spare her and to have more manliness than to take to his heart an unwilling bride.

But he seems to apprehend her intention and to make such an appeal impossible.

Lord Claude's path at this time, however, is not one of roses, and it is scarcely wonderful that he looks pale and anxious, that he is nervous and irritable, and that what seem like mere trifles are sufficient to annoy and anger him.

Mrs. Hamblin is not as plastic in his hands as he would like her to be.

Conscious as she is of the worldly advantages which this match will bring to her daughter, and hard and resolute as she is in compelling Hetty to accept her noble bridegroom, she is not at all pliable with regard to the details of the marriage.

His lordship would like the ceremony to be as private as possible.

Mrs. Hamblin will have it performed at the parish church

at Colneford, at midday, and will have no secrecy whatever about the matter.

She would like her daughter to be married by bans, but this point she has conceded, though she insists that, on leaving the church the bride shall be taken to Colnehurst Castle, where a reception will be given to such of his lordship's friends as choose to attend.

Lady Daphne, however, is from that time to consider the castle no longer her home, Mrs. Hamblin being the first to declare that her ladyship has behaved so rudely to herself that she declines to meet her.

It will readily be understood that the first hint of this marriage has brought Lord Claude's family about his ears like a swarm of bees.

Lady Daphne has been exceedingly bitter in her letters to her relatives, has described Hetty as the worthless daughter of a designing woman, and has suggested that Lord Claude ought to be shut up in a lunatic asylum rather than to be allowed to contract this marriage.

As her suggestion cannot be carried out, the laws of the land not admitting an unequal marriage to be a proof of insanity, their eldest brother, the marquis, their cousins and uncles all come and combine to expostulate with Lord Claude, and to point out to him the enormity of his folly.

But Lord Claude is one of those weak, impressionable men, who can be desperately obstinate and even cruel at times, one whose worst and most objectionable qualities are brought out by opposition, and who now, because Hetty is unwilling and his family are hostile to the match, is resolved to carry it out at any cost to himself or to others.

Thus matters drift on, until the fourteenth of December, just six days before the marriage is to come off.

Hetty moves about the house like one walking in her sleep, so calm and passionless does she appear. But sometimes a rapt expression will come over the girl's face, which

fills her mother's heart with sudden terror, reminding her of the picture of a fair saint going to her martyrdom.

She takes no notice of the silks and satins and jewels that are brought for her ; they might be the garments intended to be worn at a funeral, for all the interest she feels in them.

The greater portion of each day, she spends at her easel painting.

She has not quite finished the portrait of Lady Edward Tavenner's dog Sophy ; she is likewise painting a portrait of herself with the aid of looking-glasses, though for whom this is intended even her mother does not know.

But this occupation enables her to withdraw herself from the preparations that are going on around her, and likewise from the society of Lord Claude when he comes to Stanmoor.

Her mother has recently expostulated with her for secluding herself so much in her own room, and consequently she is working at her easel in the sitting-room to-day when Lord Claude enters.

The greeting she gives him is chilly and formal ; she stands cold and mute as a statue, though something like a shiver passes over her frame when he clasps his arm round her waist and kisses her.

But though she does not return, she does not seem to resent the salute, and he, taking courage from the circumstance, says, tenderly :

"Hetty, I am afraid that business of importance will take me from home to-morrow, or the next day at farthest."

"Indeed, my lord !" she replies, and a smile comes over her face.

A smile so rare to it now that it seems like a gleam of sunshine breaking through wintry clouds.

He reads the hope that flashes through her mind, the hope that he is going to leave her, and he knits his fair brows, as he says, steadily :

"Yes, and I want you to go with me."

"You must know, my lord, that I will never willingly go anywhere with you!" she gathers up courage to say, and her eyes flash as she speaks.

"Nonsense, my dear, nonsense!" he answers, slightingly; "you will soon get over that little prejudice, and will be perfectly miserable when I am out of your sight."

To this Hetty makes no answer; but resumes her painting as though she had not heard him.

For a few seconds his lordship regards her with a scowl.

He has wooed many, and been wooed by some; but never did he come near any woman so invulnerable to the charms of his wealth, his rank, and his own fascinating person.

If he could only make her love him, he would be almost satisfied to go away and leave her, and see her no more.

But until she welcomes him with smiles, and when he would leave her hangs upon his neck and entreats him to stay, he feels that he cannot go, that he must — that he will conquer her.

Seeing that Hetty continues her work, as though he were no longer present, Lord Claude seeks Mrs. Hamblin, and, without ceremony, informs her that he will have to leave home within the next forty-eight hours, and that he wishes to take Hetty with him.

"We can be married to-morrow, or, at latest, early the following morning," he says, in the assured tone of one who can dictate his own terms; "then we shall travel for some months, and, by the time we return, all the gossip and excitement will be over, and we can settle down quietly."

But Mrs. Hamblin detects, or thinks she detects, some shiftiness about the proposed arrangement.

She fancies that there will be some legal flaw in the marriage, or, nearly as bad, that Lady Daphne has refused to leave the castle, and that her brother lacks sufficient strength of mind to compel her to go.

So she answers, quietly but firmly:

"I am sorry that your business is so pressing as to delay your marriage, my lord; but, as for my daughter being married to-morrow or the next day, as you suggest, that is quite out of the question."

"And why?" he demands, arrogantly.

"Because she and I would both object to such a step," is the steadily-uttered reply. "Indeed, I believe that Hetty would refuse to marry you at all on such short notice."

"Are you sure that she will not make a scene in any case?" he asks, gloomily.

"Yes; I think she would have rebelled before if she were going to rebel at all," replies the mother, thoughtfully. "But I do not like this unseemly haste, and surely your lordship cannot have any business so important as to necessitate either haste or delay."

Lord Claude bites his lips and turns away in anger.

"'Tis conscience that makes cowards of us all," and he has received a warning which he knows it will be well to heed in good time.

His impulse is to fly the country for a few months, even for a year or two; but he cannot and will not exile himself without Hetty as his companion.

What comfort or sympathy or consolation he can expect in her society it would be hard to say, seeing that she will not go with him willingly or lovingly; but he firmly believes in his own power to charm her and to reconcile her with her lot.

Her mother's attitude convinces him that he cannot hasten his marriage, however, and the question that now presents itself to his mind is, shall he stay until after the twentieth, brave the danger which he fears, marry Hetty in defiance of her own repugnance, and in opposition to his friends, or shall he postpone his marriage and go away alone for awhile?

He cannot at once decide this question.

The difficulty of his position is that he cannot confide to

any one the nature of the business that is so important as to necessitate the hastening or postponing of his marriage.

If Mrs. Hamblin were like some fashionable mothers, anxious to see her daughter well settled in life, he might tell her half the truth and convince her of the expediency of comforming to his wishes.

But in the present case he feels that this is not practicable or even desirable, and the idea of offering a large bribe for compliance is equally dismissed as unwise and useless.

So when he leaves Stanmoor, no fresh arrangement has been made, and, as far as Mrs. Hamblin knows to the contrary, the marriage is still to take place next Tuesday, the twentieth of December.

She says nothing to her daughter, but she watches her closely.

Something in the girl's quiet manner frightens her mother, she fears that she is meditating some desperate step; while Lord Claude's shiftiness in trying to hasten the marriage inspires her with a vague uneasiness.

On this day Hetty puts the last finishing touches to Sophy's portrait.

Unless forbidden to do so by her mother, she means to take it to Hindfleet Hall to-morrow, and deliver it personally to Lady Edward Tavenner.

Why she wishes to see Gilbert's mother again she scarcely knows; perhaps she hopes to hear some news of him, or it may be that she has some vague hope of enlisting Lady Edward's sympathy, or of accepting her offer to help her to study in London, supposing it to be possible for her to escape from Lord Claude.

That she will not marry him before the twentieth she is quite determined; and she will not marry him then if she can help it.

The question is, can she help it? And up to the present she has not been able to find one loop-hole for escape.

But circumstances sometimes help us when we are pow-

erless to help ourselves; and the next morning, when Hetty is thinking of walking to Hindfleet Hall, and dreading that her mother will forbid her to do so, a note is brought from the castle by a mounted groom for Mrs. Hamblin.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE letter is from Lord Claude, and contains a brief farewell.

As the marriage cannot take place at once as he desired, it must, he says, be postponed for a month; but he holds Hetty definitely engaged to himself, and he enjoins her mother to take care of her for him, and, above all things, not to allow her to talk to or hold any communication with strangers.

This letter is a singular one; too long to be reproduced here, and its effect upon Mrs. Hamblin is most disquieting.

The caution to keep Hetty away from strangers fills her with uneasiness.

What can he mean? Of whom is he afraid? And again — why has he gone away in this hurried, mysterious manner?

Remembering how urgent he has been to marry Hetty; how he had voluntarily promised to settle two hundred a year upon her husband and herself, when he and she fixed the day for his marriage, she is more than puzzled to understand what motive can be powerful enough to make him postpone the ceremony.

No solution comes to her, however. His lordship has not given her any address to which she can write; he has only said that she shall hear from him again, and, meanwhile, everything is to go on as usual — the engagement is not broken off, its fulfillment is only delayed.

The news comes to Hetty like a new lease of life granted to her, when the old one had almost expired.

Her glorious eyes grow bright with delight, her cheeks flush, she feels as though she must dance and sing to give expression to her sudden joy; and even when her mother reminds her that the wedding is only postponed for one month it does not sensibly dampen her high spirits.

But Mrs. Hamblin does not show Hetty this letter; neither does she repeat the caution contained in it about not holding any communication with strangers.

She considers the warning superfluous and absurd, and she knows that her daughter is sufficiently sharp-sighted to perceive that there is some mystery underlying this sudden departure, which she may hereafter insist upon having explained.

So she treats his lordship's absence from home and the postponement of the wedding as a matter of course; and, as much to avoid troublesome questions as to show her confidence in her daughter's prudence, she relaxes the close watch she has kept upon her, and allows her to go about pretty much as usual.

Thus it happens that, the second day after Lord Claude's departure from home, Hetty Hamblin, carrying Sophy's portrait in her hand, sets off to deliver the picture to Lady Edward Tavenner, at Hindfleet Hall.

The distance is a good two miles from Stanmoor; and, though the day is fine, the roads are wet and muddy, and to avoid getting very dirty Hetty has to walk very slowly and pick her way with care.

But she is indifferent to this.

The sense of emancipation — even though it be but for a time — from a hateful bond is still fresh upon her, and she walks along with a lightness of limb and a feeling of freedom such as she has not experienced since that day when, after being saved from the bull by Gilbert Tavenner, she reached home, and found her mother intoxicated with the sugges-

tion from Lord Claude that he wished to marry her daughter.

She has proceeded about half the distance she has to traverse, and is now on the high-road, when a dog-cart overtakes her, and some mud from the wheels are splashed upon her black gown.

It is but natural that she should feel vexed, remembering where she is going, and that she should look reproachfully at the occupants of the carriage.

But the next moment she regrets the impulse, for one of the gentlemen in the carriage is Leon de Mæstro. The recognition is mutual, and before she can avoid the meeting he has alighted from his dog-cart and is coming toward her.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"MISS HAMBLIN!" exclaims the tall Mexican, with unconcealed eagerness, "this is a great — an unexpected pleasure!"

"The pleasure of splashing me with mud?" asks Hetty, smiling.

Her instinct warns her that it will be well to treat Leon's remarks lightly, to seem to regard them as so much badinage, rather than as the expression of his true feelings.

"The pleasure of meeting you!" he cries, "and I beg ten thousand pardons for my friend's clumsiness in driving!"

"One-tenth of those pardons wil be more than sufficient," she responds. "But how is your sister? Well, I hope?"

The Mexican's dark face takes a deeper shade, ere he replies, gravely:

"My poor sister will never be well again; but she is not ill in body — it is the mind, the heart, that is wounded. But

you should come and see her, Miss Hamblin; she would like much to meet you again."

"Yes, I should like to see her," returns Hetty, nervously, "but my mother does not allow me to go anywhere. You will remember me kindly to her — won't you?"

"With infinite pleasure," he replies.

Then he asks, suddenly:

"Do you live near here?"

"No, not very near," she answers, evasively.

"May I be permitted to call and pay my respects to your mother!" is his next question, which makes her blush and hesitate, and say at length:

"You must not think me rude or unkind when I say no; but my mother does not receive visitors, and she does not like me to make new friends."

"But I am not a new friend," he protests, "and I must see you again."

Just at this moment, as Leon is standing in the road, talking to the fair girl, his burning eyes fixed upon her lovely face, the very stoop of his shoulders as he bends toward her eloquent with the love which he dare not yet express — an open carriage, drawn by a pair of horses, drives past, the servants upon which salute Hetty, the more deferentially, perhaps, for the pleasure of annoying their mistress, who sits behind them.

Lady Daphne Irongate does not bow to her; she stares insolently at the girl, whom she regards with a rancorous hatred, and she makes some remark to the gentleman seated opposite, which impels him to look curiously at Hetty as long as he can keep her in sight.

The dog-cart, which is waiting a little ahead, shows very clearly whence the dark-faced foreigner had come to the muddy road; and poor Hetty's cheeks burn hotly with the consciousness of being misunderstood.

Leon perceives something of this.

He had observed the respectful manner of the servants,

the cruel, malignant stare of the youngest of the two ladies in the carriage, and he is scarcely surprised when Hetty says, nervously:

"I cannot ask you to call and see us at present, senor; but please give my love to your sister, and to Miss Mertonville, when you meet her again. Good-by!"

"Pardon me," he replies, his face changing as he finds he cannot interest her sufficiently in himself to induce her to take a step contrary to the wishes of her mother; but I saw a gentleman walking with you in Walberswick, the day you left so suddenly, and it is important to me that I should know his name."

"You must mean Lord Claude Irongate," replies Hetty, blushing in spite of herself; "that was his sister in the carriage that passed us just now."

"Ah!" exclaims Leon, with restrained passion; "he was fair, his hair was the color of gold, so was his long, drooping mustache; he was not so tall as I and he bent over you as he talked."

"Yes, that was Lord Claude," reponds Hetty, sadly; "he came to tell my mother and me about the death of my brother."

"Was he your only visitor that day?" asks Leon, curiously.

"Yes, our only one; we returned with him," replies the girl, simply.

"And he lives near here?" asks the Mexican, with seeming carelessness.

"Yes, at Colnehurst Castle when he is at home," is the answer; "but I must leave you — good-day."

And she bows decisively and walks on, just as another carriage is turning the corner of the road and coming in sight.

Leon de Mæstro feels that good manners alone will forbid his forcing his company upon a girl who dismisses him with so much decision; and he lifts his hat courteously and

returns to the dog-cart, in which his friend, Di Castro, is waiting for him. But scarcely have they turned into another road than the latter alights, hides himself in a hedge, prepares to wait for Hetty, and to follow her.

But he might save himself the trouble, for the moment at least; for when Hetty comes this way, she is in a carriage, seated opposite to Lady Edward Tavenner, who, having overtaken and recognized her, had on a sudden impulse of generosity offered her the seat in question.

Lady Edward is a woman of the world, none know better than herself that a little kindness and courtesy, that cost nothing to the giver, will very frequently gain more than a pocket full of gold.

Hetty's approaching marriage with Lord Claude, also, has been the all-absorbing topic in the neighborhood; and her ladyship feels that she will be rather glad to tell her son, in her next letter to him, how she picked up the future bride and drove her home with her.

As for poor Hetty, if the truth be told, she would rather have escaped such an honor, but she could not and dare not refuse it; and thus she and her ladyship drive on, until they reach Hindfleet Hall — and here another embarrassing circumstance occurs!

Mrs. Beevor, Lady Daphne Irongate and Lord Ingledene are seated in a carriage that is drawn up at the principal entrance, and are questioning a footman as to the time his mistress will return, when Lady Edward's carriage appears in sight.

This is the first time that Lady Daphne has called at the hall since the rupture of her engagement with Gilbert Tavenner, and Lady Edward is naturally surprised to see her here.

The ostensible excuse for her presence is soon apparent, for she says, after the first greeting:

"We have brought Lord Ingledene to see you, Lady

Edward; he claims to have known you when he was quite a boy."

"A very big boy!" says his lordship, uncovering his head.

Lady Edward's face flushes.

It is not always pleasant for the friends of one's youth to present themselves unexpectedly in this fashion, but she quickly hides her annoyance, and says, courteously, as she extends her hand:

"I remember you now; but your father was alive when we last met."

"Yes, poor old man; he never got over Harriet's marriage," says his lordship, sadly.

Then he stares at Hetty, whom the rest of his party had not perceived, and mentally concludes that Lord Claude intends to wed an exceedingly pretty girl, if this is the object of his choice.

Lady Daphne follows his gaze and frowns angrily, but Hetty pays no heed to her.

She is struck by the gentleman's face; there is something in it both strange and familiar to her, and she is wondering where she can have seen him before.

Lady Daphne, however, misunderstands the cause of Hetty's interest in Lord Ingledene, whom she believes to be attracted by herself, and, with a disdainful glance at the girl, she says, coldly:

"We will call some other time, Lady Edward; I see that you are engaged now."

"Not at all," is the answer; "this young person can wait."

And telling a servant to take Hetty to the library, she herself leads the way to the drawing-room, her visitors following her.

"Awfully pretty girl that!" remarks Lord Ingledene, after they have talked about old times for a few minutes and the conversation has begun to flag. "Doesn't she

remind you of somebody whom we both knew, Lady Edward ?"

"No, I cannot say that she does," is the answer ; "though I think I had some impression of the kind when we first met."

"She is wonderfully like the portrait of my poor sister Harriet, that was taken about the time she was engaged to Lord Edward," says his lordship, with a yawn ; "though I was at college at that time. You must remember her, for I have since heard that you and she were bosom friends."

Lady Edward's face flushes and she frowns, angrily.

It is unpleasant to be reminded five-and-twenty years after their occurrence of actions of our own which we would gladly forget, and she retorts, tartly :

"I don't remember ; she doesn't remind me of Harriet in the least."

Then, changing her tone, she asks, carelessly :

"Are you staying in this neighborhood ?"

"Lord Ingledene is our guest for a few days," Lady Daphne here volunteers, thus saving him the necessity of a reply. "He came yesterday to see Claude, but my brother has gone away from home, so we persuaded him to stay and amuse us."

"Lord Claude gone away !" exclaims Lady Edward, in surprise. "I thought he was to be married next week to —to" ——

Then she pauses, not exactly caring to mention Hetty Hamblin's name.

But Lady Daphne laughs disdainfully, shrugs her shoulders and says :

"My dear Lady Edward, that affair will never come off, I feel very sure. Auntie and I have taken a little house in Mayfair, in which we must pack ourselves if such a thing does happen ; but my belief is that Claude already repents his madness and wants to find a way out of the scrape he has been led into."

"He will have no difficulty upon that score, I should think," remarks Lady Edward, coldly. "If one can believe half of what one hears it is the girl who is the most unwilling party to the contract."

"Oh, of course she has told you so," sneers Lady Daphne.

"She has told me nothing about it," is the haughty retort. "For a reason of my own I wished to see her; I gave her a small commission to execute, and she was on her way hither to deliver the work when I picked her up and brought her home with me."

"Oh, yes; we saw her in the road, talking to a tall, foreign-looking man, who seemed to be making love to her. Didn't we, my lord?" sneers Lady Daphne.

And she turns to Lord Ingledene, who answers, cautiously:

"A gentleman was talking to her, certainly; but he could not have been doing so long, for his dog-cart was waiting for him."

"Suppose he had been talking to her for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour," here exclaims Lady Edward, hotly, "what harm could there be in that? In my opinion Hetty Hamblin is as modest as she is pretty."

"Hamblin, Hamblin!" repeats Lord Ingledene; "where have I heard the name?"

But nobody assists his memory.

Lady Daphne has risen from her chair, and to hide her annoyance at hearing Lady Edward praise Hetty has walked to one of the windows.

Very bitterly she remembers the scene that took place in this very room the last time she was here; then, as now, Hetty Hamblin was the subject of discussion, and if she vindictively hated the girl then, she hates her now with a tenfold intensity.

But she is powerless to vent her malice upon Hetty, and,

say what she will to the contrary, she knows that her brother is firmly resolved to make the girl his wife.

His doing this will take her out of Gilbert Tavenner's way, it is true, but by this time Lady Daphne knows full well that her own engagement with Lady Edward's son will never again be renewed.

When she turns from the window and rejoins the others, she finds her aunt and Lady Edward talking about the little house in Mayfair, which is to be their home as soon as Lord Claude is married, while Lord Ingledene is turning over the leaves of an album, too busy with his own thoughts to pay any heed to the conversation the two elderly ladies are carrying on near him.

His lordship is not a young man; he must be over forty. He is handsome in his way, but he has a dissipated appearance, as though he had lived every day of his life, and had burned the candle very freely at both ends.

The reader has seen him before, but when and where it is unnecessary at present to specify.

He has of late declared his intention of giving up his bachelor habits and taking to himself a wife, and Lady Daphne is seriously wondering whether she can do better than accept him when he proposes, as she thinks he intends to do.

She smooths out the frown from her brow as she comes to his side, and for the next quarter of an hour the conversation flows pleasantly enough, Hetty Hamblin and references to Lady Edward's earlier days being alike banished from it.

Lady Daphne enjoys the petty triumph she is having over Hetty by keeping her waiting all this time, otherwise she would not prolong her visit as she does. But at length her aunt rises to go, and she is obliged to follow her.

Still she lingers, as though she had something to say to Lady Edward, which she does not find the courage to

express, and when she takes her leave her visit to her hostess seems to have been purposeless.

But when she and her companions are gone, Lady Edward Tavenner sinks upon a chair, her hands clasped upon her knees, with an expression of pain, sorrow and conscious humiliation upon her proud, time-worn face.

There are many crimes for which no legal penalty can be exacted; some, too, that society tacitly consents to ignore.

You must not steal a man's purse, neither must you obtain goods from him on false pretenses. But you may worm yourself into his confidence, separate him from the woman he loves, to whom he is engaged to be married, and become his bride yourself, without incurring any very severe censure from your dear fellow-creatures.

And if the woman who has been robbed of a husband should afterward make a fiasco of her life, while under the influence of some temporary infatuation, the result in the opinion of the world justifies you in your theft, because your outwitted rival has clearly demonstrated how culpably ill-balanced was her own mind.

So far the dishonorable act is without punishment, but men and women have consciences whose voices will sometimes make themselves heard, try as they will to stifle them, and Lady Edward Tavenner this afternoon would give much to be able to say to herself, "I have been as true and honorable to others as I should wish them to be unto me."

She rouses herself at last from her unpleasant reverie, and remembers Hetty, whom she had told a servant to take to the library.

Her feelings toward the fair girl are at this moment particularly kind and gentle; she had observed on her face this afternoon traces of the mental anguish which she has recently gone through, and, though her ladyship still considers a union between Hetty and her son as impossible as ever, her own love for Gilbert makes her sympathetic toward one who loves him also.

In this frame of mind she goes to the library to speak to Hetty, and apologize for keeping her waiting so long, but when she enters the room she finds it empty.

The portrait of Sophy stands upon the writing-table uncovered, but the girl who painted it is gone — gone without being paid for the work and without saying a word to any one.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Hetty Hamblin, still carrying the canvas in her hand, follows the footman into the library.

Her mind is in a tumult of contending thoughts and of conflicting feelings.

She had come here with the vague hope in her heart that she would hear something of Gilbert Tavenner, and that his mother would show some sympathy for her, possibly some sign of relenting.

That hope is crushed by the careless manner in which she has been sent to the library to wait until the visitors are gone.

If she were not unnerved and made angry by the scornful and hostile glances which Lady Daphne had bestowed upon her, she would realize that Lady Edward has treated her with some consideration, in sending her to the library, instead of requesting her to wait in the housekeeper's room.

But she is too much irritated by Lady Daphne's scorn, and by the evident preference shown to her, to notice this nice distinction.

She feels that she had no business to bring this painting herself, when she could so easily have sent it by somebody else.

For Gibert's sake she ought to have kept away — for her own sake — yes, even for Lord Claude's, she ought not to have exposed herself to such a rebuff as that under which she is now smarting.

Day by day the conviction is growing upon her that she will be compelled to marry Lord Claude if Gilbert does not come to her rescue, but now it seems, to her agitated mind, that no rescue is meditated — that no hand will be extended to save her from her impending doom.

She looks about the room in which they have left her.

There are more books here than she could read in a life-time, but there is an unused look about the place, as though the one person most accustomed to use it was absent or dead, and the atmosphere of the room is cold and musty, with a church-yard smell, which makes her shiver.

For a few minutes she remains standing in the big room, pale and irresolute.

Through the window she can see that small flakes of snow are falling, and she remembers that she has fully two miles to walk before she can reach home.

She was anxious to come here — she is now more anxious to get away quickly.

There is nothing in this room to remind her of Gilbert Tavenner; she cannot picture him in her mind as having spent much of his time here; indeed, he seems to have gone so far away from her that, if she were to hear of his death, she would not be greatly surprised, deeply grieved though she might feel; and she hastily uncovers the portrait of the pet dog, places it upon the table, and, without lifting a book or examining a picture, she opens the door and walks into the entrance hall.

As it happens, there is no one there at the moment, and she lets herself out of the house, no one heeding her.

If any one of the people engaged at the hall observed a girl, dressed in mourning, walking down the avenue and through the lodge gates, which stand wide open, they took no notice of her, and Hetty soon reaches the high-road, without having been obliged to speak to any one.

By this time, snow is falling fast; but she has an umbrella, and she walks on, unmindful of the storm, the

cold, miserable weather being more in unison with her own feelings than would be sunshine or a cloudless sky.

But she cannot make much progress with the wind blowing her back, and the snow driving in her face, and evening has set in before she enters the gates of Stanmoor.

Mrs. Hamblin, who has been anxious about her daughter for the past hour, comes forward to greet her affectionately.

She has ceased to trouble herself about Jem Blake, having heard that he has left the neighborhood; but an anxious mother can always conjure up a dozen specters wherewith to torment herself, and Mrs. Hamblin had rendered herself very wretched before her daughter makes her appearance.

Fresh clothing, a large fire and some hot tea soon revive Hetty; but her mother hovers about her like one who cannot make enough of the girl whom she feared was lost, and at length she says, pleadingly:

"Hetty, I wish you would promise me not to stay out after dark like this again. I did not like to keep you from going to Hindfleet Hall, because I saw you had set your heart upon doing so; but believe me, my dear, it will be much wiser for you never to go there again."

"I never want to go again," replies Hetty, sadly.

She bows her head and clasps her hands tightly, as she speaks.

And her mother divines at once that her visit has been a failure.

Suddenly her tone changes, her eyes flash, and she asks, with quick suspicion:

"*She* has not been rude to you, has she? Surely, with all her faults, she would not treat you with discourtesy."

"No; oh, no!" replies Hetty, wearily. "Lady Edward was kind; she overtook me and offered me a seat in her carriage; but Lady Daphne, and her aunt and a gentleman were at the door when we reached the hall, and—and I was taken to the library to wait; but I grew restless, the

room was cold, and I came away without a word. I hope it was not rude of me to do so."

"It doesn't matter!" replies her mother, impetuously; "the less you have to do with any of the Tavenners the better. But I won't see her if she comes here, Hetty, remember that! You may make any excuse you like; but I won't see her!"

"No, mother; I hope she won't come again," replies the girl. "I don't think she will, though she was kind to me in her way."

Then she relapses into silence, until Mrs. Hamblin says, abruptly:

"Hetty, I wish you would promise me never to go to Hindfleet Hall again without my knowledge."

"But I did not go without your knowledge to-day, mother," objects the girl, reluctant to give a promise which circumstances might tempt her to break.

"I know that, dear; but I wish you would promise me."

"As you like, mother," is the listless answer. "I don't suppose I shall ever want to go there again."

Thus the promise is given, neither of them dreaming of the strange circumstances under which it will be broken.

The next morning a mounted groom comes from Hindfleet Hall, bringing a letter from Lady Edward Tavenner. It contains a bank-note for five pounds for the portrait of Sophy, with a few haughty words, expressing the surprise and displeasure of the writer at the artist leaving the hall without being paid for her work.

There is really nothing offensive in the letter, except the tone in which it is written; but there is certainly no indication of her ladyship's real anxiety to know if this tiresome girl reached home the previous evening in safety.

If the truth were stated with absolute plainness, Lady Edward would not be sorry to hear that Hetty had gone away to some distant part of the world, whence she would never trouble her again. Nay, more, it would certainly not

cause her any acute sorrow to know that the girl was dead; but, for all this, she would not like any harm to come to her on immediately leaving the hall, hence her reason for sending this note and ordering the servant to wait for an answer.

Hetty's answer is humble and respectful enough; she simply thanks her ladyship for the money, and signs herself, "Your obedient servant, Hetty Hamblin."

So the matter seems to end.

Her ladyship is annoyed by the brevity of the answer and startled by the handwriting; but she gives no signs of this, and thus the distance between Gilbert Tavenner's mother and the girl he loves is widened, and Hetty is made to feel more keenly than before the hopelessness of the love which she still continues to secretly cherish.

Mrs. Hamblin observes her daughter's despondency, and is rather glad of it than otherwise.

Judging Hetty by the standard of other girls, she believes that, as soon as she is convinced that Gilbert Tavenner cannot marry her, she will turn to Lord Claude a smiling face, and be prepared to welcome him cordially.

But she does not understand her daughter, as she quickly realizes when she tries to interest her in the costly silks, laces, and sparkling gems brought together for her wedding. Strangely enough, Hetty's mind is cast in a more lofty mold than that of either of her parents; and though a multitude of circumstances which she cannot combat may compel her assent to a marriage which her soul abhors, she will be tempted by no paltry vanity to take pleasure in the sacrifice.

Thus Christmas passes by.

A white, cold Christmas, in which there is much suffering among the very poor and a striking absence of festivity among the very few rich people in whom we are interested.

Lady Edward Tavenner will not make merry in the absence of her son; and Lady Daphne Irongate, with all

her assurance, cannot very well fill Colnehurst Castle with guests while her brother, who is away, may return at any moment, bringing home the girl whom she so cordially hates as a bride.

Lord Ingledene, whose first visit had only extended over a couple of days, does come back to spend Christmas and a few succeeding days with the ladies at the castle.

But he does not propose, as Lady Daphne wishes he would do.

He is no longer a very young man ; he has a fair estate and a good fortune, slightly impoverished by his own recklessness. But he has seen enough of the world to know that a sweet and amiable temper is, of all things, the most desirable qualification in a wife, and a very little experience suffices to convince him that Lady Daphne is conspicuously deficient in this respect.

Although Lord Ingledene is very attentive to Lady Daphne, he does not say anything about matrimony, and she sees nothing before her but a speedy removal to the little house in Mayfair, which she has spoken of so bitterly as being the refuge of her aunt and herself.

She has steadily omitted to remark that Lord Claude has offered her a house on the other side of Colneford, about three miles distant, but which she has scornfully refused. considering that her acceptance would necessitate some recognition of his low-born bride.

Mrs. Beevor, however, has expressed her willingness to go to the Laurels, and Lady Daphne has been very angry with her aunt, on more than one occasion, when the latter has said that she thinks Hetty very lovely and would like to know her.

"You had better call upon the girl and on her vulgar mother!" Lady Daphne observes, tartly, at breakfast, on the last morning of Lord Ingledene's visit, when the trainer's daughter is the subject of conversation!

Do, Mrs. Beevor, and take me with you," says his lord-

ship, gayly. "I cannot understand how such a divine creature can have a vulgar mother, and, for reasons of my own, I should like to see her."

"I don't think it will be well to call before Claude returns," replies Mrs. Beevor, cautiously; "if anything should happen to prevent the marriage, my having recognized the girl would complicate matters."

"I would give a thousand pounds to prevent it!" cries Lady Daphne, passionately, "and I would give thrice the sum to know that the girl was dead!"

She speaks thus, heedless of the presence of the butler and the new footman, who, though they look demure as statues, can hear every word she says.

Lord Ingledene gives his shoulders a deprecatory shrug.

If he had ever felt the least temptation to ask Lady Daphne to be his wife, this venomous remark would have saved him; and, wishing to change the subject, he asks if it is known when Lord Claude will return home.

"Yes; he talks of coming back upon the fourteenth of January," replies Mrs. Beevor, "and of being married on the twentieth."

"It was a funny thing, his going away at all if he means to marry the girl," sneers Lady Daphne.

Whereupon Lord Ingledene looks intently into his coffee-cup, and makes no comment.

He is a good fifteen years older than Lord Claude; he has known him from childhood, known a few of the many scrapes into which the latter has got himself from time to time, and he can quite understand that there are several matters that require settling before his lordship openly and near his own home enters into the bonds of matrimony.

So he says nothing in response to Lady Daphne's implied invitation to criticise her brother's conduct; and as soon as the meal is over, he goes to a side-table and takes up one of the morning papers.

Carelessly he glances his eyes down the columns of births,

marriages and deaths, feeling, for the moment, convinced that there is no mortal whose name, in either one of the three lists, can in any way affect himself, when he just restrains an exclamation of surprise as he sees among the deaths the name of "Trevor."

And this is what he reads:

"At sea, December 20th, Laurence Trevor, of the Swan's Nest, Hammersmith, in his twenty-eighth year. South American papers please copy."

Again and again he reads over this advertisement; then he mutters to himself thoughtfully, as he turns over the newspaper:

"It's a bold game if the girl's story was true; a queer game also. I shall have to see the end of it."

Meanwhile Lady Daphne is walking in one of the conservatories alone.

She is very much annoyed with her aunt, and likewise with her guest.

The first, she believes, is ready to go over to the enemy, or, in other words, to espouse the cause of her brother and of "that girl," whom she hates more intensely than she ever hated mortal being.

Suddenly, in the darkest part of the fernery, into which she has wandered, a man stands before her.

Looking up she recognizes the new footman, and she asks, haughtily:

"Why are you here?"

"I came to speak to you, my lady," is the mysteriously-uttered response.

"Speak on," she returns, in the same lofty tone.

"You said just now you would give one thousand pounds to prevent a certain marriage, my lady, and three thousand to know that the young person who is going to be married to my lord is dead. Do you mean it, Lady Daphne? Or was it only talk?

As the man speaks Lady Daphne clenches her hands and

looks about her fearfully, as though she thinks that the very plants have ears to hear the words addressed to her.

Her heart has for months past been full of evil wishes, her malicious thoughts have made life's cup unwholesome and bitter to her; she has been a torment to herself, a thorn in the flesh of all who know or care for her; but of absolute, deliberate wickedness she has not hitherto been guilty.

Partly because there is a great deal of difference between wishing ill to a person and actively bringing actual disaster upon him or her; and, secondly, because she has had no one to do her dirty work of mischief; and, single-handed, if she had attempted any deed of violence she would certainly have been detected and would most probably have failed.

> "But when to mischief mortals bend their will,
> How soon they find fit instruments of ill!"

And here is the instrument ready to hand, wanting only to know whether she meant what she said, whether or not she is prepared to pay the price she has recklessly offered for the destruction of her rival.

For a second or two she is silent, the instinct of self-preservation warning her that it will be dangerous to have any dealings with this man, who has only been in the house a few days.

But her bitter hostility toward Hetty Hamblin overcomes and silences the voice of prudence, and at length she answers, steadily:

"Yes, I meant it."

"Very well, my lady; which is it to be?" asks the man, quietly; "the one thousand job or the three—stopping the marriage, I mean, or getting rid of the young woman?"

"I cannot tell you now," she answers, nervously. "Somebody is coming this way. I will speak to you this evening, when my aunt has gone to bed."

The man touches his hat and turns away, just as Lord Ingledene advances to speak to her, and to say good-by.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HETTY has not mentioned her accidental meeting with Leon de Mæstro to her mother, nor indeed to any one.

In the first place, she attaches but little importance to it, supposing that he was driving from Colneford to Rickstow on pleasure or business, and that he at once went out of the neighborhood.

As a matter of conversation she might speak of the Mexican and of his sad and handsome sister; but she knows that the fact of his wanting to call upon them would distress her mother, and therefore she is silent upon the subject.

She does not speak about Leon to Lord Claude, either, when he returns home.

"It cannot concern him," she would say, if questioned on the subject, "and as Lady Daphne saw her in the road there could be no secrecy upon the matter."

So his lordship does not hear of the Mexican's appearance in the neighborhood, does not know that he has once been here, and though he looks thinner than when he went away he appears less worried and more satisfied with himself than he has done since that hurried visit to Walberswick.

Hetty, too, seems more resigned to her fate. She feels that there is no release, no redemption for her.

Gilbert Tavenner has neither written nor sent to her; his mother conveniently looks another way on the few occasions upon which they have recently passed each other, and, though poor Hetty's love remains unquenched, her hopes have dwindled to the very lowest ebb.

Mrs. Hamblin's influence has been at work upon her daughter during the past month, so that the poor unhappy girl is quite convinced that this marriage is inevitable.

Joe Hamblin is now seldom, if ever, sober, but he takes a long time in drinking himself to death, so long that his wife sometimes grows impatient, wondering how much longer she is to be tied to such a hopeless sot.

Lord Claude, however, is kindness itself to Joe.

He never reproaches him with his vice, he never refuses him money; he would give him anything he liked to drink, provided it keeps him quiet; and though the once clever trainer is practically superseded in the stables over which he had control, he is still nominally in his old position.

Hetty has done all that a girl can do to save her father, and has failed.

She has wept and prayed and struggled to save herself from the power of Lord Claude, and again has failed.

Now she must yield to the force of circumstances, and her mother's reasoning has had so much influence upon her that she is resigned to yield gracefully.

Lord Claude is agreeably surprised at this change in Hetty, for though he delights in winning an unwilling bride, there are certain limits beyond which this unwillingness becomes objectionable.

And Hetty is too little intoxicated by the splendid destiny before her to make him in any way the less eager to call her his own.

She is passive, that is all, but she is very beautiful.

Suffering has given a new charm to her beauty. It is as the moss to the rosebud, and those who see her regard her in amazement, wondering how one of Earth's children can be so divinely fair.

Lord Claude had returned home a few days earlier than he was expected, and found division in the camp.

His aunt and his sister had managed to quarrel with a little more determination than usual, and Lady Daphne has announced her intention of leaving her aunt and going to live with a distant friend.

His lordship arrives in the middle of this discussion, and he is agreeably surprised to hear his aunt say:

"I shall be very glad if you will go to your friend, Mrs. Blake, my dear, then I shall be free to accept Claude's offer of the Laurels; and meanwhile I can entertain his guests

here. I shall be very glad to have Hetty Hamblin to come and see me before the marriage, as well as after."

Lady Daphne's eyes flash viciously.

If she has had any qualms of conscience about a wicked and unworthy contract into which she has entered regarding her rival, she dismisses them now, and after this momentary exhibition of anger she says, sullenly:

"Please yourself, but you will live to be sorry for having taken sides against me."

Then she orders her maid to pack her trunks and boxes, and the day after Lord Claude's return Lady Daphne leaves Colnehurst Castle, it may be for a month, it may be forever."

Lord Claude feels as though he had just woke up from a nightmare, and found the sun shining, when his sister has departed, and he is free to do as he likes in his own house.

Now he can bring Hetty here, can show her the conservatories, the beautiful rooms in which she will live; and together they can plan their own way of life, and can order such changes as they both desire.

Whatever his past experience or failings may have been, however weak at times, and remorseless at others, Lord Claude is very genuinely in love now.

He means to marry Hetty, openly and honorably, and he knows the world well enough to be sure that, however much his neighbors and friends may disapprove of his choice, they will soon come round sufficiently to appreciate Hetty's gentleness and beauty when she is once his wife.

Mrs. Hamblin hears of Lady Daphne's departure from the castle with undisguised satisfaction. Now she feels that the coast is clear, that Hetty's future prosperity is assured, and greatly as she inwardly shrinks from going into anything like society again, she receives Mrs. Beevor with gentle dignity, and accepts her invitation to bring her daughter to the castle to dinner on the following day.

Poor Hetty! very unlike are her feelings to those which

should animate the heart of a bride-elect going to the palatial home of her future bridegroom.

She will wear none of his lordship's gifts. Her dress is of white surah silk, purchased with her own money, made by her own hands, in a hanging, clinging, artistic fashion, which her mother had at first ridiculed, though it now excites her admiration.

Some white flowers, which are sent her from the castle, she feels that she must wear, and at the last moment her mother insists that she shall put on Lord Claude's betrothal ring.

"We have no right to go to the castle if you do not wear that ring," asserts Mrs. Hamblin, decisively, "and I insist upon it. You are making a fuss over trifles; five days' hence you will wear a ring that will mean much more than this one, and to make a fuss now is weak and childish."

Hetty shivers, as though a blast of icy wind passed over her frame, but she submits, and the gleaming diamonds seem to fascinate her like the eyes of a serpent, and to take from her all power of resistance.

A carriage comes to fetch them, and the footman who had asked Lady Daphne that strange question in the fernery is on the box.

Very curiously he gazes at Hetty and her mother, the latter attired in black velvet, and looking, as he mentally decides, "every inch a lady."

He himself has seen strange vicissitudes, and was not always intended to stand behind a lady's chair, attend her to a carriage, and assist at a feast of which he at the same time does not partake; and he wonders, as such men will wonder, how such things as he sees can come to pass.

He does not wonder at it so much when Joe Hamblin, his handsome face bloated and his gait unsteady from his recent potations, comes fussily forward, and, with the jocose remark, "Make way for my lady!" insists upon helping his wife into the carriage.

If Joe had paid this attention to his daughter, the footman would not have been so much surprised.

But he observes that Mrs. Hamblin steps into the carriage and takes her seat in silence, without moving an unnecessary muscle, and without taking any more notice of her husband than if he were not there.

To the bride-elect, the person of importance from the footman's point of view, Joe says, plaintively and familiarly:

"I hope you will enjoy yourself, Hetty. Give me a kiss; and, among all your fine friends, don't forget your old father, child."

Then he sees the girl bend and kiss her father fondly and whisper something in his ear, and involuntarily the tears come to his own eyes.

Surely would-be murderers should be made of sterner stuff!

It is all but the work of a few minutes. The carriage door is shut, the footman mounts the box, the horses start at a quick pace, knowing they are going home, for it is principally his lordship's race-horses that are kept at Stanmoor, and in due time the carriage reaches the castle and Hetty and her mother alight.

Under other conditions of feeling both of them might feel nervous and shy, but to Mrs. Hamblin it seems as though she were going back to a page of her old life before her mad marriage dragged her down so low that the dregs in the cup of life were as gall and wormwood to her taste, and she accepts the present moment as being far more in unison with her true nature than the drunken husband and the comparatively humble home which she has just left.

Hetty, too, though she observes the magnificence around her, is not greatly impressed by it.

For Lord Claude comes forward to take her hand, links his arm in hers as though he had a right to do so, and, though she slightly thaws when Mrs. Beevor bends and

kisses her, she becomes cold and apathetic again directly afterward.

Lord Claude has observed the precept in giving a dinner party which advises :

> " Let your numbers be
> Not more than seven ;
> Never less than three."

And there are exactly seven who sit down at the same table on this eventful evening.

There is the Honorable and Reverend Digby Daincourt, rector of Colneford, with his wife, a gentle, pleasant little woman, who has come this evening partly to please her husband and partly to oblige her old friend, Mrs. Beevor.

And there is a Mr. Stuart Smallgrove, who knows the rectoress well, and who has much to say about her only daughter, who is not present.

It is a small party, but a pleasant one, and Mrs. Beevor treats Hetty with so much friendly kindness that she wins the girl's heart.

Nothing unusual occurs this evening, except that Lord Claude sees his future bride for the first time to advantage.

She is well-dressed, with suitable surroundings, and she bears her part in the evening's entertainment as bravely as any one.

At dinner she does not talk much, but when the gentlemen come to the drawing-room they find Mrs. Hamblin seated at the piano and Hetty singing, with such a compass of voice — undeveloped, it is true — and such a clearness of enunciation that surprises no one so much as Lord Claude, who was ignorant that she possessed such an accomplishment.

"We must have your voice trained, my darling," Lord Claude says, in an undertone, as he bends over the fair songstress.

And she involuntarily shivers.

The walls of fate are closing in upon her, and everything she does well but makes escape the more impossible.

As for Lord Claude, he is intoxicated with delight.

Hitherto he has wooed Hetty in defiance of his friends — in opposition to the judgment of anybody.

Now his aunt and the rector, both of whom may be taken as good judges, pronounce her to be perfect — as charming in mind and manner as in person.

So pleased is he that he accompanies Mrs. Hamblin and her daughter home in the carriage, and consequently, if the footman had made any plans for carrying out his diabolical plot this evening, he is doomed to disappointment.

The little party has been a success, however, and Lord Claude feels that it promises well for his future happiness and comfort.

On the following morning he comes to Stanmoor, with a note for Hetty from his aunt, asking her to accompany him back to the castle and spend the day.

"It is very kind of Mrs. Beevor," says the girl, mechanically re-folding the note when she has read it; "but I am very busy, and"——

"Nonsense, child!" here interrupts her mother, promptly; "of course you must go. I can attend to everything; go and get ready at once."

And Hetty, with evident reluctance, obeys.

She will not touch her trousseau — she is still in mourning for her brother — but she puts on a costume of black cloth, trimmed with imitation Astrakhan fur, with a tall hat to match; and, though her dress is not costly, there is a certain severe style about it that well becomes the wearer.

Lord Claude, who, like many other men, has an intense dislike to mourning, would like Hetty to discard it at once, but her mother has advised him to say nothing about it just at present; there will be no mourning garments in the trousseau, and the bride will not be allowed to take any of them with her on the honeymoon.

Lord Claude and Hetty walk along the frozen lanes and over the hard road, side by side, saying little — thinking, perhaps, the more.

His lordship feels satisfied, now he has the girl with him, now he has cleared away all obstacles from his path.

He feels that the sky overhead is blue — that the cup of life is sweet; and, though Hetty is not as joyous and animated as he knows she can be, he feels assured that this is only another joy to come.

On their way to Colnehurst Castle they cross the high-road, and, looking to the right, Lord Claude perceives the rural postman hurrying along the road as though he would overtake them.

The man has, evidently, a letter or letters for Stanmoor, and would save himself the walk by giving them to Hetty.

But his lordship does not approve of such an arrangement. His mental comment is: "The man is paid for his work; let him do it."

And consequently he says nothing to his companion, who scarcely looks to the right or to the left, unconscious that if she only turned her head and waited but a few minutes longer a letter from Gilbert Tavenner would be handed to her.

She does not look, does not wait. Blindly, hopelessly she suffers herself to be led along to what seems to be her inevitable destiny.

And the postman, disappointed at not being able to shorten his walk, trudges on to Stanmoor, grumbling to himself as he hands the letter addressed to "Miss Hetty Hamblin," and bearing several foreign postmarks, to the girl's mother.

Mrs. Hamblin takes the letter in her hands, walks into her sitting-room with it, examines the writing and the postmarks carefully, and divining intuitively from whom it comes she muses, thoughtfully:

"I won't give this to Hetty; it will only upset her. Nor

will I open it. I don't want to know what he says. I should feel like a traitress if I read words that would make my child's heart glad and refrained from giving them to her."

Then she takes the letter, opens a secret drawer in her desk and places it therein.

There is but one other paper in this recess, and that is the certificate of her own marriage—a curious document, wherein the names of bride and bridegroom are stated, with the relative names and position of their respective fathers.

CHAPTER XXX.

Unconscious of the great happiness she has just missed —the happiness of reading the first love-letter written to her by Gilbert Tavenner—Hetty walks along by the side of Lord Claude until they reach Colnehurst Castle.

Lord Claude is naturally proud of the property which he inherited from his mother, and now he points out many of the beauties of the spot to Hetty, talks of what they will do, and of the changes they will make when they are married, asking her opinion and deferring to her taste whenever he can induce her to give expression to it.

If Hetty could only love him—if she could only banish from her heart the image of another, how contented and happy she might be, with such brilliant prospects before her!

Some such thoughts as these pass through her mind as she looks at the splendid building waiting to call her its mistress, at the extensive park, the dark woods, and at the silver stream, which seems little wider than a ribbon gleaming in the sun's rays.

But when she turns to her companion, the very wish to love him dies away.

Why she knows not, because physically she admires him,

as every woman must do, but there is something in him that repels her.

Mrs. Beevor receives the girl warmly; she has taken quite a fancy to Hetty, and Lady Daphne's absence permits her to give expression to her feelings unchecked.

And Hetty is grateful for his kindness; she feels that his lordship's family will not all turn against her; that she will have one at least to turn to for sympathy; and to-day she rather vexes Lord Claude by the way in which she seems to cling to his aunt rather than to himself.

He had made up his mind that he would have a long day with Hetty, his aunt joining them occasionally just for the sake of appearances; but to his chagrin he finds that it is his own society that is only wanted occasionally, and that Hetty and his aunt shut themselves up in the latter's boudoir for a couple of hours at a time.

Servants have eyes and ears, if they say but little in the presence of their master or mistress; and Lord Claude's discontent, and the manner in which the girl whom he is about to marry shrinks from him, does not pass unnoticed.

The tall footman who had asked that singular question of Lady Daphne takes a deep though silent interest in Hetty.

He waits upon her whenever he can find an excuse for doing so, he watches her face, and listens to the tones of her voice; himself mute as a statue, though by no means so impressionable.

It is a great disappointment to him, therefore, when, after the carriage had been ordered to take Hetty home, and he had arranged to go with it, the order is countermanded, and the fair girl expresses a distinct preference for walking instead of riding.

Mrs. Hamblin has insisted that her daughter shall be home soon after five in the evening, and as his lordship will accompany her the presence of the servants is dispensed with.

So again our heroine reaches her home in safety, sufficiently unhappy in the present condition of affairs to surmise for a moment that matters can in any way be worse than they now are.

Hetty notices this evening that her mother is rather strange in her manner, that she avoids meeting her gaze, though when she looks up suddenly she finds that her parent is studying her face intently.

She thinks that her mother is pitying her for the sacrifice she is soon about to make, and, sad though she is at heart, she tries to smile and to look cheerful, feeling that it is well to make the best of a painful situation.

Mrs. Hamblin is not really deceived by this cheerfulness.

She had locked away Gilbert Tavenner's letter, promising herself that it should not again see the light of day until Hetty and Lord Claude are safely married; but now, when she sees her daughter, conflicting doubts torment her.

First of all she fears that Hetty will bitterly resent this concealment when it comes to her knowledge, as in the course of events it is sure to come, for the letter was registered; Mrs. Hamblin had to sign her name for it, and it can, therefore, be traced to her possession.

As a mother she has a right to withhold the letter, it is true, but she will not like to take this ground when questioned on the subject; and, in addition to this, she wonders what the letter can contain, and whether it would really disturb Hetty and make any difference in her conduct if she were allowed to read it.

But still she dares not give it to Hetty; so much depends upon this marriage with Lord Claude that she feels that it must take place, let the after-misery be what it will.

And, after all, this letter may only contain honeyed words which a girl who could afford to wait might treasure in her heart, but that might have a most disastrous effect upon one who is on the point of marriage with another man.

"Oh, why did this letter come — why did it come at this

time of all others ?" groans the poor mother in her mental torment. "Was not my burden heavy enough to bear without this additional trouble being forced upon me ?"

But through all her mental anxiety she maintains a cautious silence.

Her husband is a little more sober to-day than usual, and would like to be jolly and genial, but he soon comes to the conclusion that his wife is sulky; and though his daughter tries to interest him, he speedily returns to his beloved bottle.

This is the day after Hetty's second visit to the castle, and on the third day from this her wedding is to take place.

Only two clear days remain to her, and Hetty shivers as she looks out upon the snow that is falling in small, feathery flakes, coming down steadily and silently upon the earth, that for several days past has been ice-bound.

"Mother," she says, musingly, "how pleasant it must be to sleep with the dead flowers under the snow, and never wake again !"

"Ridiculous nonsense !" retorts Mrs. Hamblin, sharply. "Your head is full of childish fancies; it is to be hoped that when you are married you will drive some of them away."

"Perhaps all," responds the girl, sadly.

But she says no more, though she sits and watches the snow, until the voice of Lord Claude rouses her from the reverie into which she has fallen.

His lordship kisses her before her mother as a matter of course; and she submits patiently, the time for resistance being past.

Then he says :

"I came in to see you for a few minutes, darling, before I go to Birchhill to see Reginald Stanley, who has sent for me. I shall not be home until rather late this evening, and I thought you would wonder if you did not see me for the day."

"It is kind of you to be so considerate, my lord," Mrs. Hamblin here interposes, feeling sure that her daughter will not say anything appropriate to the occasion.

And Hetty, who recognizes a warning in the voice, echoes the idea as she says:

"Very kind!"

His lordship's visit, however, is not a long one. He has to drive, in the dog-cart waiting for him outside, to Colnehurst, whence he can take train to Birchhill; and as snow has begun to fall since he left home he is anxious to reach the railway station as soon as possible.

When he is gone, a strange silence seems to settle upon the inmates of Stanmoor.

Hetty resumes her seat at the window again when dinner is over, and watches the snow, which continues to fall during the whole of the short afternoon.

At length her eyes become dazzled by the white snow; she grows giddy with watching it float and gyrate, unwilling to descend upon the foul earth upon which it will have to lie, and the gray shades of coming night are drawing in as she approaches the glowing fire, and closes her eyes, which ache with the strain upon them.

She has not been here many minutes, however, before a knock sounds at the door, and presently the servant enters with a note.

"From the castle, miss," says Molly, with great importance.

And Hetty, in some surprise, takes the envelope and tears it open.

Inside it is a note, which runs as follows:

"DEAR HETTY—Come back in the carriage I have sent for you. I want to see you about something of importance. My love to your mother.

"Yours affectionately,

"GERALDINE BEEVOR."

"I suppose I must go," says Hetty, handing the note to her mother.

"Miss Hamblin?" exclaims the Mexican, "this is a great—an unexpected pleasure!"

And the latter replies, reluctantly:

"Yes, I suppose you must; but I don't like you to go out such an evening as this. The roads will soon become impassable, and, whatever else happens, you must not stay at the castle to-night."

"Of course not," assents the girl.

Then she goes to her room to prepare for her cold drive.

Snow is falling heavily when Hetty appears at the house door, ready dressed to obey the request contained in the note which has just been brought to her.

She does not recognize the coachman, who is muffled up above the chin and whose hat is pulled over his eyes, the better to protect him from the biting cold snow and the driving blast.

But she recognizes the footman as one of the servants at the castle, who is particularly attentive to her, and she smiles affably as she says:

"A cold day, isn't it?"

Then she takes her seat in a carriage which, even at the first glance, appears old and shabby to come from such a house.

But she is indifferent to the appointments of her conveyance, and if she thinks about the carriage at all she will conclude naturally that an old one has been sent for her because of the terrible weather and the heavy condition of the roads.

Mrs. Hamblin accompanies her daughter to the door.

She would like to come with her, but she is not included in the invitation. Lord Claude is away from home, and she really has no excuse for refusing to allow Hetty to go without her.

So she contents herself with kissing her daughter, enjoining her to be back early, and then the coachman gives his horses their head, and they plunge on through the semi-darkness at such a pace that only one already mounted on horseback might follow them.

Mrs. Hamblin stands and watches the carriage for a few minutes with apprehension, and feels uneasy at the rapid pace at which it is going.

But the blinding snow and the shades of evening soon hide it from her gaze, and she closes the door with a shiver and returns slowly to the now desolate sitting-room.

Singularly solitary does Mrs. Hamblin feel as she sits down this evening alone to her tea.

A sense of loss, of impending misery, hangs over the deserted room, gleams at her through the fiery bars of the open grate and whispers a dirge to her in the long, sweeping sigh of the moaning wind.

At length this feeling becomes so oppressive, so unbearable, that she goes to seek her husband with the vague idea in her mind of sending him to the castle to fetch their daughter.

But Joe has been keeping out the cold this afternoon in his old fashion; he answers incoherently when his wife talks to him; he staggers as she tries to lead him across the room; then he sinks upon a seat, lays his head upon the table and speedily falls into a deep slumber.

And the agitated mother goes back to the sitting-room to wait for the return of her child.

Wearily the hours pass by, but Hetty does not come.

Again and again Mrs. Hamblin goes to the door to look out upon the night.

The snow falls, slowly and monotonously, as though it would go on forever.

She listens intently, waiting for the sound of carriage wheels, but no more wheels come to Stanmoor this night.

Hour after hour passess by but Hetty does not return, and, although the severe weather may be the cause of this, surely some messenger might have been sent from the castle to relieve her natural anxiety.

But no messenger comes, and when the clock strikes the hour of midnight the troubled yet angry mother retires to

rest, feeling that it is useless to sit up any longer for her daughter.

"I never knew Hetty so inconsiderate before," she says to herself, plaintively, as she tries to sleep, "but I suppose Mrs. Beevor insisted that I should never expect her home such a night as this."

When morning dawns the wind has risen, the snow has ceased to fall; but it has drifted so much that in some places the ground is bare, in others the white mass is piled up so high as to completely block in both doors and windows.

"Any poor creature who was out last night might easily have been lost in a snowdrift," Mrs. Hamblin thinks, uneasily, as she looks through an upper window at the beautiful but wintry scene before her.

Then she returns to the sitting-room, to find her husband standing on the hearth-rug, washed, brushed and shaven, looking more sober — more in his right mind — than she has seen him since the death of poor Chris, which he took to heart so sorely.

"Molly tells me that Hetty didn't come home last night," he says, shortly. "Did you expect her?"

"Yes, I told her to come back early," is the answer. "I tried to rouse you to go and fetch her, but I could not."

And, as she says this, Mrs. Hamblin turns away.

The time when she reproached her husband for his besetting sin has gone by, but her silence on the subject wounds him more keenly than would any taunts.

"I'll go now." he says, shortly and resolutely. "They'd no right to keep her without sending you word, let the weather be what it would."

Then he departs on horseback, but in less than an hour he returns home with the startling, bewildering intelligence that Hetty is not at the castle; that she was not there at all on the previous day, and that Mrs. Beevor had not sent for her.

"And where is his lordship?" asks Mrs. Hamblin, in a voice steady with concentrated anger.

"He will be here directly; I didn't wait for him," is the answer. "I came to tell you — to ask what is next to be done."

But his wife cannot answer him, the news that she has just heard is so appalling that she sits like one stunned by a sudden blow.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HETTY is startled by the pace at which the horses are being driven.

Snow falls so thickly that she can see nothing through the windows; but at the rate at which she is traveling she feels sure that they must reach Colnehurst Castle very shortly.

She leans back in the shabby carriage and falls into a reverie, in which her thoughts wander away from the present, and she is only roused from her abstraction by the sensation of cold that creeps over her, and by the startling conviction that they must have traveled very much farther than her supposed destination.

Looking through the closed window on either side does not help her.

At length her uneasiness is so great that she pulls the check-string, but without avail.

Then she tries to open one of the windows to call to the servants; but in this she is baffled, they are fastened tightly, and except by breaking the glass, she cannot move them.

Although she knows the danger of opening one of the doors while the carriage is going at such a pace, she is so terrified that she makes an attempt to turn the handle, and so far she succeeds with both of the doors; but for all this

neither of them will open. They are both securely locked on the outside.

When Hetty realizes that this is the case, when she understands at length that she is as securely shut up in this carriage as a mouse can be caught in a trap, she sinks back into one of the cushioned corners and covers her face with her hands, while hot tears of anger, vexation and terror spring to her eyes and course down her cheeks.

She can only suspect one person of this outrage, and that is Lord Claude.

There is no doubt in her mind that it is he who has planned this infamous step to get her in his power, to make his own terms with her, and, if he marries her at all, to do so under his own conditions.

She remembers that something has always stood between them.

That she has never believed in him, that even when of late she has tried to love him a warning voice in her heart has always cried out against the would-be intruder.

Presently indignation gives place to grief, and she mentally vows that if she again can gain her freedom she will follow the dictates of her own heart, and will refuse to be coaxed or coerced to marry any man in whom she cannot place absolute trust.

On one point, however, her mind is at rest. She has no fear for her personal safety.

No one would go to the expense and trouble of running away with her in this fashion who wished to kill her.

But she is bitterly cold.

There is no foot-warmer in the carriage; she has no traveling rug. Darkness has set in, and still on the carriage goes, silently now and at a slower pace, for the ground already is covered to the depth of three or four inches with snow.

Nothing makes one feel more wretched than intense

cold, and, when to this cold is added darkness and terror, poor Hetty's condition can well be understood.

How long she has been in the carriage she does not know, for a drowsiness has come over her, and once or twice she has fallen asleep, but whether for more than a few minutes at a time she can never tell.

Suddenly she is startled by the sense of motion ceasing.

The carriage stops, lights flash in her eyes and dazzle her, the door is opened and some one invites her to descend.

But her limbs are cramped by cold, and a cry of pain escapes her as she tries to move them.

And the next instant she is lifted up by a pair of strong arms and carried into a house as though she were a baby.

A large fire is burning in the room where she is taken, and a lamp is alight on a table, but the change of temperature is too great for her.

The sudden transition from the dark, close yet bitterly cold carriage to the bright, warm room overcomes her altogether, and she sinks to the ground in a swoon.

When she returns to consciousness she is alone with a dark-eyed, dark-browed woman, who seems to regard her with dislike rather than with favor.

"Where am I?" she asks, faintly, looking round the small room.

"You are safe," is the laconic answer.

"And my mother? Oh, send for my mother!" pleads Hetty, earnestly.

The hard look on the woman's face softens a little, though she answers, sharply and with a foreign accent in her voice:

"You can talk about your mother to-morrow; you must eat and sleep now. See, there is soup, an omelet, and wine."

"I would rather have a cup of tea, if you please," says Hetty, faintly.

And the woman repeats:

"Tea!" in a disdainful tone, though she leaves the room, and presently returns with a small teapot, cup and saucer, a couple of thin slices of bread and butter, and an egg in its shell.

The tea revives Hetty, though she will not touch the egg, and the woman sits at a little distance and watches her silently.

Watches her sullenly and jealously, with eyes of hate rather than of kindliness or sympathy.

So marked is this, that our heroine, meeting one of these glances, and taking courage from the warmth of the room, and the refreshing beverage she has swallowed, asks, gently:

"Why do you dislike me? What harm have I done you that you look at me like this?"

But the woman makes no answer.

She rises suddenly, gathers up the tray and the tea-things, and carries them out of the room, closing the door after her.

When, some ten minutes later, she re-opens the door noiselessly and looks in, she sees Hetty kneeling on the ground, praying earnestly, her eyes closed, and the light of the lamp falling upon her pale, beautiful face.

So like to a kneeling saint is the fair girl that the woman, who is a devout Catholic, crosses herself piously and withdraws, resolving, despite the snow, to go to confession the next morning and relieve her troubled soul by telling her confessor what she dare not breathe to any other ears.

When she again returns to the room Hetty is seated in the one comfortable chair before the fire, but her eyes are heavy; she is still feeling the effect of her long, cold drive, and a drowsiness, which she cannot shake off, is stealing over her.

She rouses herself when the woman appears, and asks, pitifully:

"Why am I brought here? What am I wanted to do or

to promise — tell me, I pray? My poor mother will break her heart if I do not return to her, for I am all that she has left!"

Ask me no questions to-night," replies the woman, shortly. "You are safe while you are with me; be satisfied to know that."

Then she lifts up the top of the ottoman couch, takes out sheets and blankets, and, having closed it again, prepares a bed on the cushioned seat.

Hetty watches her, but makes no comment. She is not sorry to find that she is to sleep here in the warm room, where a large fire is still burning.

The woman's assurance, also, that she is safe comforts her, for there is something about this strange, foreign-looking creature that inspires confidence as to her veracity, though one might very easily believe that, if her jealousy is roused, she would not hesitate to use the dagger or poisoned bowl to rid her of a rival.

Wearily, like a tired child, Hetty Hamblin sleeps through that long, dark night.

Many times the young woman who has charge of her steals in on tip-toe, and gazes at her sweet face with a mixture of admiration and jealousy hard to reconcile.

Once she brings in a woman, much older than herself, but like her in all but youth, and the two stand side by side and gaze in wonder at the sleeping girl, who is blissfully unconscious of their presence.

When Hetty opens her eyes the next morning, the fire is burning in the grate with a crackling sound, as though it had just been lighted, and the young woman who had waited upon her the night before is standing by her side, with a roll and a cup of strong coffee on a tray in her hands.

Her face wears a softer expression than it did the night before, and she says, gently:

"You have slept well. Take this, then dress yourself; you may have a visitor shortly."

For the first few seconds Hetty has not realized where she is, nor what has happened. But as the memory of that cold, dark ride comes back to her she buries her face in her hands, and her slender frame is convulsed with sobs.

"There, don't weep!" says the woman, soothingly. "There is nothing for you to weep about. No harm shall come to you while you are here, and you shall not be taken away but of your own free will."

"Thank you, thank you for that promise!" sobs the girl, gratefully.

Then she dries her eyes and proceeds to follow the woman's instructions.

Meanwhile the woman bustles about the room, dusting and putting things in their places.

Presently she says:

"My name is Nita; 'tis well to know it. And yours is?"

She pauses for a reply, and our heroine answers, simply:

"Mine is Hetty Hamblin."

"Ah! a pretty name," she says, with an unconscious sigh.

But her face changes suddenly, as a peculiar knock sounds upon the front door, and she exclaims, hurriedly:

"Here he is and we are not ready for him."

Then she leaves the room, and a few minutes afterward returns, ushering in a man whom Hetty looks at with astonishment, believing she has never seen his face before.

It is not until he says, with a slightly foreign accent:

"Good-morning, Miss Hamblin!" that his voice seems slightly familiar to her.

But still she does not know him, and she answers with as much fear as dignity:

"Good-morning; but I don't know you! From whom do you come?"

"I came on my own account," he replies, blandly. "I

had the honor of bringing you here last night. Do you recognize me now?"

"You surely cannot be the footman from Colnehurst Castle who brought me the note yesterday?" she answers, incredulously.

"But I am," he replies, with a laugh at his own cleverness. "The make-up was wonderfully good, was it not!" he asks, with familiar confidence.

Hetty does not smile in return, but she looks at the stranger's face, steadily, finding it still hard to believe that this foreign-looking man, who looks something between an artist and a bandit, was ever the tall footman, with the powdered hair, plush breeches, and silk stockings, who had stood behind her chair, and had anticipated her slightest wish as only a well-trained servant can do.

Still it is possible that the man's story is true.

She remembers that he had large, dark eyes; bold, handsome features, and that he looked superior to his fellows.

At any rate, whether his assertion be true or false, it is nothing to her, and she says, coldly and with unconscious haughtiness:

"I am waiting to hear why you assumed that disguise, and why I was trapped and brought here last night."

He has been standing up to this point; now he throws himself into a chair on the opposite side of the table, remarking:

"As I am no longer a servant, you will not object to my sitting in your presence."

Hetty makes no answer.

Under ordinary circumstances she would have been courteous at once; but she feels sure that his easy tone of familiarity covers some snare, and she waits coldly, but patiently, to hear what he has to tell her.

With all the fellow's natural self-assertion, her manner disconcerts him, and he says, with considerably less bravado in tone and manner:

"My disguise had nothing to do with you. I was sent to Colnehurst Castle to learn something about its master, and it was while I was there that Lady Daphne Irongate offered to give a large sum of money to prevent your marriage with her brother from taking place."

"Lady Daphne!" echoes Hetty, in amazement.

"Yes, her ladyship objected to you as a sister-in-law," he continues; "and together she and I arranged this little trip, which I hope one day you will cease to regret."

"Then it is Lady Daphne, and not Lord Claude, who has paid you to bring me away from my mother in this cruel manner?" asks the girl, scarcely able to credit what he has told her.

"Of course!" replies the man, with a laugh. Then he adds, curiously: "Why should Lord Claude want to run away with you when he confidently expected to make you his wife the day after to-morrow?"

But Hetty does not answer him.

She rises slowly and thoughtfully, goes to the fire-place, and, with one foot on the fender, she leans against the mantel-shelf, her mind too full of wonder at what he has told her to pay much heed to the man himself.

The man's statement, if true, relieves her mind of one anxiety, while it conjures up half a dozen others in its place.

She knows that Lady Daphne hates her; and since she has been so unscrupulous as to deprive her of her liberty, to prevent her marriage with Lord Claude, she can well believe that the vindictive woman will stop at nothing to attain her end.

But this does not trouble Hetty greatly.

In so far as she is personally concerned, she will be very glad to escape from marrying his lordship; and thus, after a few minutes spent in thought, she turns to the man who is watching her, and asks, disdainfully:

"How long does her ladyship propose to keep me here?

When does she suppose that her brother will be convinced of the uselessness of opposing her ?"

"You don't want to marry Lord Claude," asserts the man, drawing a bow at a venture. But, eliciting no response, he continues: "I have not watched you in vain, Miss Hetty; it is your mother who is forcing you to marry his lordship. You personally dislike him, you shrink from him whenever he comes near you; in your heart you will be as glad to have this match broken off as will be Lady Daphne herself."

But to this again the girl makes no answer.

If silence gives consent to a suggestion, then he has it; but Hetty's chilling manner never relaxes as she says, coldly:

"You have not told me how long her ladyship means to keep me here against my will."

"The length of time depends upon yourself," he answers, blandly. "Her ladyship does not consider her brother will be safe against your fascinations until you are married."

"Indeed! And whom does she intend me to marry?" asks the girl, her eyes flashing with scorn and indignation.

"Your humble servant," is the answer, with a profound obeisance. "She knows that I adore you."

"Thank you, sir; that is sufficient!" is the imperious and indignant reply. "You can leave me!"

And she turns away, and places her hand upon the bell-rope, ready to ring for Nita if he does not at once obey her.

CHAPTER XXXII.

When Hetty turns again from the fire-place, the man whom she had hitherto known only as a footman is gone.

Her indignation had made her calm and haughty in his presence; but now she is alone she sinks upon the nearest chair, in the deepest dejection.

With head bowed, hands clasped, and an expression of the most profound sadness on her beautiful face, Hetty sits here for a long time thinking of Lady Daphne Irongate, and wondering what further diabolical step she will take when she finds that her plan of making her marry this man is likely to fail.

Little as she knows of the world, she feels certain that, as Lady Daphne has gone so far, she will have to go still farther, and the conviction speedily forces itself upon her mind that, since she has become the victim of this unscrupulous woman's hatred, her very life is in danger.

She is thus thinking in this desponding fashion when Nita, the young woman who waits upon her, comes into the room, ostensibly to look after the fire.

When it is replenished, she fidgets about the apartment, taking up one thing, putting away another, until Hetty at length observes her movements and divines, with the quick instincts of a woman, that she has something to say, or that she desires to be questioned.

But Hetty does not know how to begin the conversation.

If she were a wealthy woman she would offer her bribes; but she has only a few shillings in her pocket, and has nothing about her of value except Lord Claude's engagement-ring.

How little she cares for this ring we have seen by the manner in which she has fought against wearing it; but she looks at it now with curious eyes, wondering how much money it is worth, and whether or not it is a sufficiently tempting bribe to purchase her freedom.

It is Nita who, after having waited for some little time, speaks first:

"You love the man who gave you that ring?" she says, looking at the jewel with covetous eyes.

"No, I do not!" replied Hetty, promptly. "It is my mother who wishes me to marry him."

This answer makes Nita utter a cry of surprise; but she says, presently, and with a dangerous light in her eyes:

"Then you love Juan, though you flout him?"

"Who is Juan?" asks Hetty, curiously.

"He was here but now!" replies the woman, with a dramatic action of her hands, more expressive than words.

"Love *him?*" cries Hetty, with unfeigned contempt. I scarcely knew that such a creature could be till he told me himself that he had brought me here for gold."

"For gold—for love!" repeats the woman, half incredulously, yet half believing.

"Yes, for gold," asserts Hetty. "But this is worth gold, too," she continues, extending her hand, upon which gleams the diamond ring; and I would give it gladly to be free."

The woman's eyes sparkle, but she does not touch the ring. She turns away her head and says, dubiously:

"A bird could leave its cage if the door were left open by chance."

"True," assents Hetty, quickly, "and the jewel would be left in a vase on the mantel-shelf."

"Then the bird must watch for the chance," returns the woman, as she pretends to be dusting the room, "and, once free, the bird must be careful not to be caught again."

"Without doubt," the captive returns.

Suddenly she remarks, in a changed tone:

"The weather is bitterly cold and the snow has drifted. We are near Willesden, are we not?"

"Nita!" cries a shrill voice at the door, and the young woman hastens to answer the call, but she casts a glance at Hetty, which the latter understands.

It is alike a warning and a reply to her question; and both of them know that Nita's fidelity is doubted, that both of them are watched.

The reason of this is clear enough to Nita; she has shown her jealousy of the captive, her fear that Juan, whom

she loves, may care for the fair-faced stranger ; and even Hetty's assertion that the man brought her here for gold does not reconcile her to her presence.

But if Hetty will escape, no blame being attached to herself, and if she will leave the diamond ring behind as the price of her freedom, Nita will be very well satisfied to have the matter thus ended.

The moment she saw the girl's beautiful face she was jealous of it; and the conversation between Juan and Hetty, which she had partly overheard through the key-hole, had greatly disquieted her.

Juan had tried to pacify her, and had assured her that the girl would only remain in this house for a day or two, but Nita feels sure that there is danger in her presence. She and her mother and her family have been engaged in political intrigues in South America, from whence they came; they are always planning and plotting to return thither, and they are not the class of people who would keep a girl here against her will, except to oblige a friend, and that also but for a short period.

After this Hetty goes to the window, and looks out upon the white road and the snow-covered landscape.

There are no houses exactly opposite, though a road has been planned out for building purposes.

Her remark about their being near Willesden was a pure guess on her part, made rather because she thought some one was listening at the door than with the anticipation of discovering her exact whereabouts.

But she had heard the railway whistle in the distance too frequently not to feel sure that they must be near a great junction.

Very few people pass the window, and those who do so seem in a great hurry, as though they were anxious to catch a train, or to get shelter from the bitter wind.

Hetty has put on her out-of-door jacket, remarking, when Nita comes in and looks hard at her, that she feels cold.

Her hat and gloves and veil are all ready to hand; if the door were open she could leave the house without spending two minutes in preparation, and more than once she is tempted to go and try the doors and force her way out.

While she is thus meditating, Nita comes in with a tray, upon which is a chicken, stewed in rice, but she is accompanied by her mother, who stands and watches her suspiciously.

Something in the younger woman's face, however, impels Hetty to say, "Thank you," and to seat herself at the table as though she were hungry.

But when the women are gone and she is left alone, she looks over the tray curiously, hoping to find some message to guide her, and, to her delight, she discovers a tiny piece of paper half under her plate upon which is written in pencil:

"This afternoon a man will come; while he is here the bird can escape, but the cage door must be left open. Burn this and remember."

Hetty understands the hint conveyed in the note, or she believes she does, and she makes a good meal, not knowing what length of time may elapse before she will taste food again.

When the tray is fetched away the captive is standing by the fire-place; the tiny note has been burned, and the diamond ring no longer gleams upon her finger.

Nita observes this, but she makes no sign, for her mother is again watching her, and Hetty, conscious of the presence of the old woman, takes up a book and affects to be interested in its contents.

Slowly and uneventfully pass the next two hours. Never in Hetty's short life has time seemed to drag upon her hands as it drags now.

The wintry day is drawing to a close. It cannot be much

short of four o'clock when Hetty observes a man pass the window whose face she has seen before.

Where has she seen it ?

Memory is for the moment at fault, then the truth flashes upon her mind — it is the face of the man who was in the dog-cart with Leon de Mæstro, when he overtook her as she was on her way to Hindfleet Hall.

He knocks at the door of the house, and it suddenly occurs to her that the ex-footman said he had been in service at Colneford Castle for a purpose that did not concern her.

She likewise remembers that Leon asked her the name of the gentleman with whom she was walking at Walberswick, and that he seemed to anticipate her reply when she said, "Lord Claude Irongate."

Can Leon de Mæstro have had anything to do with bringing her here ? she asks herself, but she speedily decides that this cannot be so. The footman had been bribed by Lady Daphne, and, whatever his motive was for being at the castle, it did not concern her.

Meanwhile the front door has been opened and closed behind the visitor, and now Hetty feels that her time has come.

She pins on her hat and veil, thrusts her hands into her muff, then stands breathlessly and listens.

Very gently she turns the handle of the room door and opens it.

The sound of voices falls upon her ears.

A few light, noiseless steps bring her to the front door.

With hands made nervous by terror, she pulls back the latch, opens the door and passes out, leaving it open behind her.

She dare not run for fear of attracting attention, but she walks with all her speed, the boisterous wind carrying her along until she has turned the corner of the street, has got

where there are more houses, and now she begins to feel safe from pursuit.

The sight of a policeman gives her fresh courage ; she is half inclined to appeal to him for protection, but prudence whispers to her that it will be best to hasten home as speedily as possible.

So she asks the guardian of the peace the way to the railway station, and he, seeing nothing unusual in her appearance, directs her, then goes slowly upon his cold and monotonous round.

When she reaches the station she observes that trains are coming and going with bewildering rapidity, and she hastens to the booking-office, and asks for a ticket for Colneford.

"Train just gone, miss ; won't be another for two hours," is the cheering reply.

"Two hours !" echoes Hetty in dismay.

Then a sudden idea occurs to her mind, and she asks, promptly :

"When will there be a train for Ricksworth ?"

"Due in three minutes," is the answer.

And she procures her ticket, finds the right platform, and gets into the Ricksworth train without any misadventure.

Stanmoor, where Hetty lives, stands very nearly midway between Colneford and Ricksworth.

But the difference between the two places is that the former is a market town, with a couple of railway stations, and any number of cabs and flys for the convenience of travelers, and Ricksworth is a miserable little roadside station on another line, without a refreshment-room, and where any kind of conveyance is impossible to be obtained unless it has been previously ordered.

It is also within half a mile of Hindfleet Hall, a house which Hetty never expects to enter again.

Hetty knows the difficulty of reaching her home from

Ricksworth. She will have to walk every step of the way; walk along the dark country roads alone, where the drifted snow will make the short journey a very perilous one.

But any discomfort, any danger is preferable to staying here, with the chance of being recaptured or followed until she is alone and defenseless, and therefore a more easy prey.

By taking this train she must escape pursuit, because her flight can scarcely as yet have been discovered.

It is a cold ride. There is no moon to-night, and the country would look very dark indeed if it were not for the snow, which lies as it fell in some places that are sheltered by the wind, and that is drifted into great heaps in others.

A dangerous night to be about in the dark, when pitfalls are covered with a white garment, as though they were solid ground, and the least deviation from the road might plunge one into a snow-drift.

Hetty realizes the danger as well as the discomfort of the long walk before her. But she is anxious to get back to her parents, to allay their anxiety on her behalf, and she steps out of the train with a light heart and gives up her ticket, casually noticing that there are only two other passengers besides herself, two men, who seem to be scarcely workmen and are certainly not gentlemen.

She pays but little heed to them, nor they to her. She is dressed in black and has a veil over her face, while she has tucked her hair under her hat as much as possible, so that there is really nothing about her to attract attention.

But she does observe one thing.

It is that one of the two men carries a leather bag in his hand that is heavy and of which he is very careful.

They all come out of the station together, but the men cross over to a beer-shop and Hetty, who knows the road, sets off at once to walk to Stanmoor.

This road will take her past the gates of Hindfleet Hall,

but, though it is not the nearest way to Stanmoor, it is, without doubt, the safest on such a night as this.

She has proceeded but a short distance when snow begins to fall — snow in large flakes, big as a two-shilling piece — and in a few minutes she is covered from head to foot by the blinding storm.

If she had an umbrella she might shield her face and in a measure protect herself; but she has none, and the multitude of white flakes bewilder her.

But the snow-storm is so furious she feels sure it cannot last long, and she looks about her, vainly for a few seconds, for a shelter.

Suddenly, as she presses forward, she finds herself close to a dark building, a kind of barn, just inside a field by the side of the road.

If she can only find entrance here till the storm is over she fancies she will be safe, and she opens the field-gate and tries the door of the building.

To her delight, though there is a padlock on the door, it is not locked, and she pulls it open and enters, feeling at the same time something like a trespasser.

But this blinding storm is excuse enough for any trespass, and she pushes her way into the barn, which is probably used for farm implements.

It is all dark, she can see nothing and she has no means of obtaining a light; but she has a certain sense of security against others being here because the place was closed from the outside, and without thinking of what she is doing she still holds the padlock in her hands.

She has been standing here for five or ten minutes, waiting for the snow-storm to abate. The door is a little open but she is herself in shelter, and she is wondering how long she will have to wait here, when the sound of voices comes on the air and she knows that men are approaching.

A sudden terror comes over her. She knows not why, out she feels sure that they are coming to this very building.

Her impulse is to leave it — to hide herself; but whither can she go?

There is snow everywhere. Snow is falling so thickly that she would soon be buried if she sought shelter in a ditch, and, even as she hesitates, the men push open the field-gate and come to the tool-house.

At this terrible moment Hetty's perceptions are preternaturally bright.

The men are coming here from set purpose. She knows, she feels it, and she must hide herself accordingly.

So she gropes her way to the farther end of the place, her hands coming in contact with certain soft things in the way, which she guesses to be empty sacks, and when she has reached an extreme corner from the door she crouches down and pulls two of these sacks over her.

If a glare of light were to shine through the place, and a search to be made, she would be revealed at once, but among carts and farm implements she is now completely hidden.

The voices are at the door of the outhouse by this time. Two men enter, and she thinks from the tone of their voices that they are the identical men who alighted from the train at the same time as herself.

From their conversation she hears that they are surprised to find the door open. She learns, also, that this is a rendezvous, and that they are awaiting the arrival of a third person.

Much of their conversation is lost to her, partly by distance, partly by the slang in which it is couched; but she hears enough to understand that a burglary is to be attempted to-night, and that they are waiting for a servant from the house in question to meet them here and give them the plan of action.

Presently a third man joins them, and for a few minutes Hetty, in her distant corner, does not understand what they are talking about.

At length she realizes that the third man, for whom the others had waited, is complaining that the son of his mistress has come home—ill, it is true—but that the "old woman" won't be alone.

"I'll leave the pantry window open for you, and you must bag the plate and the jewels," says the third man, briefly. "I've told you where they all are. But you mustn't begin till midnight. And now I must be off; my lady may ring for me at any minute."

"There's plenty more to answer her bell, isn't there?" growls one of the two men.

"Yes; but she likes me best," is the complacent response; "she is upset about a girl that was to have married Lord Claude, of Colnehurst Castle. They do say that Mr. Gilbert is spoons on the girl, and wants her himself, and that my lady won't hear of it; anyway, she's as fractious as a bear with a sore head."

Soon after this the men part, one of the first two remarking that he shall leave his bag here.

But when the question of fastening the door crops up, the padlock cannot be found, and the bag is eventually taken away.

It is not until several minutes after they are gone that Hetty creeps out from her hiding-place.

She understands it all now!

A burglary is to be attempted at Hindfleet Hall to-night; one of the footmen is an accomplice of the thieves; and Gilbert Tavenner has returned from abroad, ill and unable to protect his mother.

Under these circumstances her duty is clear. However unpleasant that duty may be, she must go to the hall and warn Lady Edward of her impending danger; then hasten away, her greatest dread being that of meeting Gilbert Tavenner.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

NEVER did girl go more unwillingly to the house of the man she loves than Hetty Hamblin makes her way up the avenue of Hindfleet Hall, and knocks loudly at the door for admittance.

Hetty's heart beats with mingled hope and fear; hope that Lady Edward Tavenner will receive her kindly; fear lest she shall meet Gilbert and be unnerved at the sight.

When the deepest feelings in our nature are stirred, it is singular how trifles will suddenly call us out of ourselves, put us on our mettle, as it were, and give us courage and assumption, such as we should not ordinarily possess.

Hetty is timid enough as she waits for the front door of the hall to be opened to her; but when a footman demands her business with Lady Edward she steps forward into the entrance hall, and says, with dignity:

"I wish to speak with her ladyship."

"Have you a card with you, miss?" asks the man, slightly impressed by her manner; though he looks at her doubtfully and critically, observing the traces of dust and of snow upon her garments, and wondering who she can be to come here on foot, and on such a night as this.

But Hetty is too intent upon her mission, too anxious to deliver her warning and to get away speedily, to heed the man or his supercilious manner, and she replies, promptly:

"No; but I will write a line to Lady Edward—she knows me."

And she steps to a side-table in the big hall, upon which are writing materials, and, taking a sheet of paper, she hastily scribbles:

"MY LADY: Please see me for a minute *alone* on a matter of *vital* importance. Your humble servant,

"HETTY HAMBLIN."

This she places in an envelope, closes and directs, then

gives it to the servant and requests him to take it to his mistress without delay.

Unconsciously she is so dignified and self-possessed in her manner, so resolute to see Lady Edward Tavenner, that the man has no option but to obey, and he takes it on a salver to his mistress, who is in the drawing-room, talking to her son.

Her ladyship takes the letter with a frown at being thus interrupted, reads it, starts suddenly as she recognizes the name of the writer, glances apprehensively at her son, and says, briefly :

"I will come."

Then she crushes the paper in her hand and flings it upon the burning coals.

But Gilbert is not curious about his mother's letters ; he has closed his eyes and is lying upon the couch, his pale, handsome face looking ghastly against the dark mass of his waving hair.

Meanwhile, Hetty has been conducted to the boudoir, and there Lady Edaward finds her standing upon the hearth-rug.

"This is a strange hour for you to come and see me," says the lady of the house, in grave displeasure, and she glances at the clock, as though she would remind the girl that she has no time to spare.

"It is, my lady," replies Hetty, quietly, "but not so strange as what I have come to tell you."

"In that case, speak," says Lady Edward, shortly.

"Are we alone — cannot we be overheard ?" asks the girl, glancing at the door.

For answer Lady Edward locks the door, draws a heavy curtain across it and asks, with a mixture of impatience and disdain :

"Now are you satisfied ?"

"Yes, thank you," Hetty answers.

Then she pauses a moment before she says :

"Burglars will break into this house to-night about twelve o'clock; one of the footmen is an accomplice, and will admit them. I overheard the plot less than half-an-hour ago, in a barn by the roadside, where I had gone in for shelter from the falling snow. I have come to tell you, because it was my duty to do so. Good-night, my lady."

And before Lady Edward Tavenner has recovered from her consternation, Hetty Hamblin is gone — gone out into the darkness and the driving snow, with two good miles to walk before she can reach home.

And Lady Edward Tavenner paces the length of her boudoir, a prey to conflicting emotions.

She lifts the blind and looks out into the dark night.

Snow is still falling, though not so heavily as it did a little while ago, and she wonders how Hetty will get home. Once, indeed, she goes to the bell to summon a servant to run after the girl to bring her back and make her wait until some conveyance can be found to take her to her destination.

But the recollection that Gilbert is in the house, that he has come home love-sick and ready to die for this very girl, arrests her hand, and the bell is not sounded — the order is not given.

"She may have come out of her way to give me this warning, but she would have been out in the snow all the same," thinks her ladyship, thus stifling the voice of conscience, and knowing nothing of the manner in which Hetty had the previous night been taken away from her home.

But, whatever her feelings may be toward Hetty, the warning she has just given alarms her ladyship greatly.

There have been several daring robberies in the neighborhood of late; one gentleman whom she knew has lost his life through resisting the burglars, and terror fills her proud heart as she realizes that she and her son may this night be at the mercy of their own servants.

One of the footmen would admit the thieves, Hetty had said; but which one? There are two, and she cannot suspect one more than the other.

The butler is an old servant, has been in her service for many years, and she believes that upon him she can rely; but, for all this, an unpleasant sense of insecurity steals over her, and she sits down, pale and bewildered, knowing not what she shall do.

It is some comfort to her that her son is at home, but Gilbert is in no fit condition of health to cope with burglars; he is still weak from a fever about which she has only just heard, and he is a prey to the torturing anxiety consequent upon the dread that the girl whom he loves is being forced into marriage with a man whom she abhors.

When Gilbert went away in the autumn this marriage seemed far ahead, because Hetty told him she would not pledge herself to any one until she was eighteen.

The consequence was that when the news reached Gilbert that the marriage was about to take place without delay he started for home at once, and would have reached the hall ten days ago if he had not been taken ill upon the road.

But directly he could hold a pen he had written to Hetty, entreating her to wait till his return; and now he has come back to his mother, to make an appeal to her to give him back his promise, if she would not wreck his happiness.

The fate of his letter we already know, Mrs. Hamblin has taken care of that; and the few words he has already said on the subject to Lady Edward have been received with so much coldness that it is very clear she has not the least intention of relenting.

He is still lying on the couch where his mother left him, when she returns to the drawing-room.

Sickness and mental depression have made a great change in him.

The strong hand is weak and nerveless, the long limbs

are languid; the fine, handsome face is thin and sunken, making the features more marked, and the eyes look preternaturally large; while his dark, wavy hair has grown longer than usual, and add by contrast to the pallor of his countenance.

His mother feels that she dare not tell him who has just been with her.

If he knew that Hetty is walking alone in the snow from his home to her own, nothing that any one could say would prevent him from following her, even though his life were to pay the penalty.

Lady Edward Tavenner feels sure of this as she sits and watches her son, and a bitter pang of pain and jealousy wrings her proud heart as she realizes that the girl to whom she had just spoken is dearer to Gilbert's heart than she is herself.

But the warning which Hetty has given her must not be neglected, though she scarcely knows how to act upon it; and for awhile she sits silent, wondering how she shall break the matter to her son without letting him know from whom she obtained the information.

Suddenly she says in a low tone, having taken a seat near to him:

"Gilbert, I have just heard that we are to be visited by burglars to-night; that one of the servants is going to admit them."

"Burglars!" repeats her son, sitting up promptly, with new light in his eyes and fresh energy in his countenance.

"Hush!" cries his mother, cautiously; "the very walls may have ears."

"But how do you know this?" he asks, controlling his excitement.

"A girl has just been to tell me," is the reply; "she overheard the men plotting. She said the hour appointed is midnight, and one of the footmen would admit them."

"Where is she — let me question her?" cries the young man, eagerly.

"She is gone; she did not wait to be questioned. I would not have let her go if I could have helped it."

"Do you know her?" asks Gilbert.

"Yes, I have seen her before," is the reluctant answer.

"What is her name?" he demands.

"Really I cannot tell you," she returns, impatiently; "but I believe the girl to be perfectly truthful. No girl would come out of her way such a night as this, to tell such a story without reward, if she did not mean to tell the truth."

"No; you are probably right, and I hope you will reward her when you have an opportunity," remarks Gilbert, thoughtfully. Then he adds, doubtfully: "I wish I knew which of the footmen is the scoundrel."

"So do I," returns his mother; "but we cannot find out with any certainty. The question before us is, what is the best thing to be done? Shall we send a mounted groom to Colneford for the police?"

"Oh, dear, no!" laughs Gilbert; "if you were alone it would be different. But I will give the fellows a warm reception, and we will take Tibbs, the butler, into our confidence — he is faithful enough. He and I will both be armed, and at the first shot the robbers will decamp, you may be sure. You lock yourself in your own room, mother, and don't come out on any pretense whatever."

"I should like more help," returns Lady Edward, uneasily; "the men who try to break in may be armed likewise, and you are far from strong."

"No, I am weak as a rat," returns Gilbert, with a tinge of bitterness in his voice; "but I am strong enough to fire a shot. And if we seem to make any preparations for defense, the traitor in our service will give the alarm, the attempt may then not be made to-night, and they will break in upon us when we are less prepared for them."

"Yes; still I wish we had somebody else to help us," says Lady Edward, plaintively.

Even as the expression of the wish is uttered a visitor arrives, the Rev. Cyrus Grandville, a curate in a neighboring parish, who had been at college with Gilbert, and had by accident heard of his return this afternoon and of his alarming state of health.

Seeing Gilbert excited as he now is, he thinks this last report greatly exaggerated, and he frankly says so; but the critical condition of affairs is soon explained to him, and then he exclaims, promptly:

"I will stay the night with you. I suppose your information is reliable and that you are not the victims of a hoax?"

"Oh, no, there is no hoax in the matter," says her ladyship, with decision.

And then they discuss the whole affair over again.

Lady Edward will not leave the young men together, and at length, taking advantage of her son's temporary absence, she says, hastily:

"Mr. Grandville, you will oblige me by not mentioning the name of that girl whom Lord Claude is about to marry to my son? Gilbert is infatuated with her; it is his insane infatuation for her that has broken down his health like this. I had hoped the wedding would be over before his return; but there is only another day now, and then he will get over it, and be out of danger."

"My dear Lady Edward, don't you know that the girl has disappeared?" asks the young man, gravely.

"Disappeared!" she repeats in amazement.

"Yes, she was carried off last night."

And then he gives an exaggerated version, as it reached him, of what did really occur.

"Lord Claude is like a madman," he continues. "There must be something wonderfully fascinating about the girl to make two such men want to marry her. Pity she doesn't

come of a better stock, though her mother is a gentlewoman, no doubt about that."

With a slight but contemptuous wave of the hand, Lady Edward sweeps away, as it were, all that has been said in Hetty's favor, and observes, in a slighting tone:

"The girl cannot have been taken far from home, for she was here this evening; it was she, in fact, who came to warn me of our danger, but I would not have Gilbert know it for all I possess."

"And where is she now?" asks the clergyman, his face changing and a stern expression coming over it.

"She has gone home, I presume," is the reply; "she did not wait for me to question her. She overheard this plot, she told me, while she was taking shelter from the snow in a barn."

"And you allowed her to go home on such a night as this, alone, after having done you so great a service?" asks the priest, incredulously.

"What could I do?" demands the lady, angrily. "She was gone before I could stop her. Besides, I could not have kept her here, with Gilbert in the house."

"For your sake, as well as her own, I hope she will reach her home safely," says Mr. Grandville, gravely; "but if any evil happens to her on the way, it is at your door that the blame will lie."

Lady Edward's retort is arrested on her lips by the return of her son, and she feels angry with her guest, the more so because she knows in her heart that what he has said is true.

The rest of the evening is dull, and drags wearily with the three people, who feel that they must behave as usual before the servants.

Gilbert Tavenner is sometimes excited, at others deeply depressed.

Cyrus Grandville is unusually silent, Lady Edward's heartless behavior being still the subject of his thoughts.

And her ladyship is nervous and ill at ease, dreading the approach of midnight, anxious also to know that Hetty has reached Stanmoor in safety and promising herself to send over early in the morning to make inquiries.

But the night is not over yet, midnight approaches and all the household seemed to have retired for rest.

Suddenly doors are flung wide open, lights flash, the sound of firearms rings through the night air. A scuffle ensues, one of the burglars is secured, the traitorous footman is a prisoner, but the second burglar has escaped, not, however, before he has shot down Gilbert Tavenner, leaving him unconscious on the ground, weltering in his own blood.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

NEVER so long as she lives will Hetty Hamblin forget her walk home through the snowstorm on that eventful night.

If the road had not been broad and straight, she must have perished in a snow-drift, for the ditches are full of snow. It is eight feet deep in some places and the ground would be bare in others if it were not for the white flakes that are still falling.

But it is when she leaves the high-road and turns down the lane which leads to Stanmoor that her danger really begins.

Again and again she falls into the deep snow, that blinds and suffocates her. But she scrambles out again, numb and weary, oppressed by the intense cold, feeling dazed and giddy, and more than once believing she had altogether lost her way.

It was about four o'clock when she escaped from the house at Willesden, and it is past nine before she knocks at the door of Stanmoor and flings herself, more dead than alive, upon her mother's breast.

Mrs. Hamblin is astonished, bewildered, but overjoyed, nevertheless.

During the past four-and-twenty hours she has been a prey to the most cruel anxiety respecting her daughter; and even Lord Claude's assurance that he would not rest night or day until Hetty is found has not afforded her much consolation. Her husband has been to Colneford twice to-day, and has now gone to London with Lord Claude to engage detectives to seek for the missing girl; and the poor mother had been seated here alone, silent and sorrowful, when suddenly the familiar knock had made her heart bound with joy, and she outstrips the servant in her haste to open the door to her beloved child.

Hetty is so terribly exhausted with cold, fatigue, and the terrible strain upon all her mental faculties that for a time she is almost speechless.

But her mother and Molly rub her hands and feet before the glowing fire, make her drink hot tea, and gradually she begins to thaw, and is able to answer a few questions which her mother puts to her.

The desire to sleep is so strong upon her, however, that her mother speedily takes her to her own room, where a fire has meanwhile been lighted, and presently the wearied girl is in a deep slumber.

"Nature's great restorer — balmy sleep," having fallen upon her, Mrs. Hamblin sits in the room and watches her daughter, anxiously.

She feels as though she could never allow the girl to leave her sight again.

And then she doubts the reality of her being here; she bends over the sleeping maiden, and kisses her tenderly; then walks about the room, and even pinches her own arm to assure herself she is awake, and not the victim of a dream.

The room is lighted by the fire and by a single candle, and again and again the fond mother takes the latter in her hand, and flashes the light upon her darling's face to assure

herself that it is indeed Hetty, and that she lives and breathes, though she sleeps the sleep of exhaustion.

What agony of mind she has suffered this day no tongue or pen can tell.

The death of her son has been as nothing to the loss of her daughter, for her mind had conjured up every possible horror connected with the girl's disappearance, and she can scarcely believe now that her fears have been all vain.

Voices down-stairs tell her that her husband has returned, and she goes to meet him, closing the door of the room carefully behind her.

Joe Hamblin is not alone; Lord Claude is with him.

Both of them had come here, disheartened and weary, to tell the sorrowing mother of the steps they have taken to find her child; and both are electrified by Molly's eager announcement the moment they enter the house:

"She's come back, sir! She's come back, my lord! Miss Hetty's safe enough, though she's tired to death, poor dear!"

Mrs. Hamblin appears at this juncture, and the glad news is confirmed—news that unnerves the two men, who have lived through such a long, agonizing day.

Presently, when they become more calm, Mrs. Hamblin repeats the little she has been able to glean from Hetty, as to where she has been and how she returned; then she adds, gravely:

"I should not be surprised if the poor child is ill after this. The walk from Ricksworth alone on such a night is quite enough to kill her."

"Yes; it is a fearful night," assents his lordship. "But Hetty is young and strong, she will soon recover from mere physical fatigue, and the day after to-morrow she will be as bright as ever."

"She will not be well enough to be married the day after to-morrow," says Mrs. Hamblin, decisively. "That

is quite out of the question. You will have to postpone the wedding for a week or ten days, my lord."

"We will talk about that to-morrow," returns his lordship, evasively. "In the morning, Hetty may be herself again, and there will then be no need for delay."

"I am afraid that is not probable," replies the mother, with a grave smile. "But we will leave it to her; nothing can be done to-night in any case."

A remark which Lord Claude takes as a hint that there is no need for him to stay here any longer, and he now remembers that his carriage and a pair of horses are standing outside in the snow.

So, after a few more words, he takes his departure, it being still uncertain if his marriage is to be again postponed, or the day after to-morrow is to see Hetty Hamblin his bride.

When Hetty wakes the following morning, a couple of hours later than her usual hour of rising, she looks around the familiar room in wonderment.

A fire is burning in the grate, a kettle is singing on the hob; a tray, upon which is a snowy cloth and cup and saucer, is on a table, and her mother is seated upon an old but well-cushioned chair, her usually busy hands lying idle upon her lap.

"Mother! dear mother!" cries the girl.

And quickly the latter is by her side, and has enfolded her in her warm embrace.

"Have I been ill?" asks Hetty, after a long pause.

"No, dear—why?" is the question.

"It looks like it to see you sitting there by the fire," is the answer. "But when did I come home? It was not a dream that I was carried away, was it?"

"No dream, my darling," is the answer, "and you must tell me all about it directly. But breakfast first. You were too exhausted last night to eat anything."

"That is not the case this morning," laughs Hetty. "I

am as hungry as the proverbial hunter, which is scarcely wonderful, as I have eaten nothing since midday yesterday."

"Well, eat now and talk afterward," is the response.

And then a cup of tea and a new-laid egg is brought, and it is not until the light breakfast is eaten that Mrs. Hamblin allows her daughter to begin the story of what she has gone through during the time she was absent from her home.

The mother's indignation is very great when she hears that Lady Daphne Irongate was the prime mover in the plot against her Hetty's liberty, and she mentally resolves that her ladyship shall pay dearly for her unprincipled and illegal interference, and the knowledge of this decides her to throw no obstacle in the way of her daughter's marriage with Lord Claude on the morrow.

After what has already occurred, Mrs. Hamblin believes Lady Daphne to be capable of any wickedness to prevent her brother's marriage with Hetty; and for this reason, if for no other, she resolves that this marriage shall be an accomplished fact without further delay.

This conversation between mother and daughter is a long one.

Tears of sympathy spring to the mother's eyes when she hears of the girl's sufferings, both in the house at Willesden and during the long walk from Ricksworth ; and yet Hetty says nothing about the conversation she overheard when she took refuge in the barn, neither does she speak of that unpleasant and flying visit to Hindfleet Hall.

Even to herself she scarcely cares to think of that brief visit.

Lady Edward Tavenner's manner toward her had galled and wounded her gentle spirit.

The feeling that she was being treated with scorn and disdain in the house of the man she loved, while, too, he was under the very same roof with her, had made that pure love, for the time, seem like some heavy affliction sent to torment her, and but for the thought of her parents mourn-

ing for her at home she could have sat down in the driving snow and wept long and bitterly.

To have done this would have been to court destruction, but, as she left Hindfleet Hall behind, the pale phantom Death had lost his terrors for her. It was the thought of the desolation that would fall upon her mother's heart that spurred her on to reach her home despite all obstacles.

But of all this she says nothing to her mother. She does not wish to mention the name of the Tavenners.

Instinct warns her that if she meets Gilbert Tavenner again before she is married his presence will cause her infinite pain and suffering, and her repugnance to become Lord Claude's wife will be tenfold intensified.

That she will be compelled to meet him at some future date she does not doubt, but when she is the wife of another, when the barrier between them will be impassable, then, she assures herself, she will be able to meet his gaze with calmness, and wonder, perhaps, in that future state how she could so passionately have loved one who had cared so very little for her in return.

Yes, this is the conviction that has been growing upon Hetty of late.

Gilbert Tavenner cannot love her or he would have made some effort to rescue her from a union from which she cannot escape.

No word of love has reached her from him since he parted with her under the trees that morning when he saved her from Jem Blake's murderous grasp.

He had gone away from England of his own free will and he has not sent her so much as a message by any one. He has now returned home and still he is silent, and he must know, as all the neighborhood knows, that to-morrow is to be her wedding-day.

After that fateful ceremony is over she will be as much divided from him as though the dark river of death rolled between them.

Thoughts like these drift through her mind as she watches the fire burn in the grate, and, looking through the nearest window, sees the white flakes of snow floating gracefully downward on the still air.

"I am helpless and powerless to resist my fate as one of those flakes of falling snow," she thinks, sadly.

But presently she rouses herself and smiles. She feels wonderfully well to-day

Despite the fatigue she went through yesterday, her deep sleep through the long night has refreshed her; she feels in good spirits also, hopeful and buoyant, in defiance of the fact that to-morrow she is to be married to a man whom she neither loves nor honors.

She marvels at herself; and yet, so easy is self-deception, she would scout the idea, if suggested to her, that the change in her spirits is caused by the knowledge that Gilbert Tavenner is again in his own home, and within an easy ride of Stanmoor.

A couple of hours later and Hetty is in the sitting-room below, and Lord Claude is at her side, talking of his love and of the bliss which the morrow will bring him.

To his lordship's delight there has nothing been said this morning about postponing the marriage.

Mrs. Hamblin seems to have forgotten her objections of last evening, and Hetty looks so bright and so much better than she has done of late that the suggestion of her health being a good cause for delay is palpably absurd.

Of course, Lord Claude is furiously indignant with his sister, and promises to make her pay dearly for her outrageous conduct toward Hetty; but he laughs joyously, as he cries, in a tone of triumph:

"She will know when we come out of church to-morrow that all her plots and plans have been in vain, for my aunt shall telegraph the good news to her at once."

Hetty smiles faintly.

She would be less than human if she did not feel some

satisfaction in thwarting the proud woman who hates her with such a rancorous hatred; but the smile is quickly followed by a sigh—the triumph, after all, will be dearly purchased.

There are so many things still to be settled that Lord Claude does not stay long with Hetty this morning.

The arrangements for the wedding already made are to hold good.

The marriage is to take place to-morrow, in Colneford parish church, at two o'clock in the afternoon.

Then, contrary to custom, the bride and bridegroom, with their friends, are to return to Colneford Castle, where such people who know them, and will care to call, will be received; but at four o'clock the wedded pair will start for their honeymoon, the first two days of which are to be spent in London.

This matter of the reception has not been arranged by Hetty.

She would much rather be married in a traveling-dress and drive away from the church, making no kind of parade or festivity about the whole affair.

But Mrs. Hamblin will not have it so. To her this marriage will, she believes, be the coming back, if only for a brief period, to her forfeited estate, and if she could only get rid of her husband for the time she could almost believe that her past had been entirely redeemed.

Mrs. Beevor has very readily fallen in with Mrs. Hamblin's suggestions.

This old lady—wise in her generation—thinks that if the marriage is to take place they may all of them as well be merry over the event. She wishes to make herself of importance to the young couple, and knowing the value of domestic trifles where our comforts are concerned she has given the maids new caps and gowns, the men servants new liveries, and has told them they may have a ball in the servants' hall to celebrate their master's nuptials.

Mrs. Hamblin also is to spend a week with Mrs. Beevor at the castle. Joe was likewise included in the invitation, but he has wisely declined it, declaring he shall be more comfortable at home.

And in this he is right. Stanmoor is still to be the residence of himself and his wife, though he is henceforth to be relieved of his duties as trainer.

Such are the plans made, but why dwell upon them ?

Man proposes ; it is God that disposes.

In all this Hetty is but as a puppet in the hands of others.

She has scarcely had a voice in the selection of her wedding-dress, though it comes home this evening, white gleaming satin, with a halo of almost invisible tulle, upon which a few orange-blossoms show the occasion for which it is to be worn.

It is very lovely, and Hetty admires it, as a true artist must do, the wintry light falling softly upon the sheeny satin. She also admires the diamond stars which Lord Claude has sent for her acceptance to be worn at her bridal, but she will not put them on as her mother suggests.

The coldness of the stones make her shiver, and she says, with unusual impatience :

"Not to-day, mother. I shall have quite enough of them to-morrow."

So the last day of her freedom dies.

If she had expected a messenger from Hindfleet all she is disappointed, for no letter or messenger comes, and the day of her captivity dawns, bright and cloudless.

Snow lies upon the valley, heath and hill, but the sun shines with that appalling glare which only sunshine upon snow can give in these latitudes.

Blinding is the cruel, white light, and Hetty draws down the green blinds to keep out the overpowering glare.

"Happy the bride that the sun shines on," quotes her

mother, as she comes smiling into the room, followed by Molly, bringing the bride's breakfast.

And Hetty, replies bitterly:

"Too happy, I am afraid, mother, if my happiness is to be in proportion to this blinding light."

To this Mrs. Hamblin makes no reply.

The morning is bright as bright can be. Snow still covers the ground, but over it is a glittering frost that refuses to melt in the sun's rays, and that makes the roads and everything that foot can tread upon as smooth and slippery as glass.

Hetty looks out upon the white landscape and shivers.

Hope has departed from her. Gilbert Tavenner will neither come nor send; and, even if he were to do either, his intervention would be now too late.

There are to be no bride's-maids at this singular wedding.

Hetty would have liked to invite Laura Mertonville to attend her at church, but both her mother and Lord Claude have opposed the idea, and she submits, as she has submitted to so much that was painful and harrowing to her feelings.

It is one o'clock, and Hetty is dressed for her bridal.

She has on her white, shining gown, with its pearly folds and graceful train.

Lord Claude's diamonds gleam upon her head and at her throat.

If beauty, a noble bearing, and clear, truthful eyes are qualifications for a coronet, then, indeed, she merits one.

With the exception of veil and gloves, she is ready to descend to the carriage that will soon arrive for her; and, meanwhile, her mother has gone to dress, and is more backward than the bride.

Hetty is surprised at her own sensations to-day, she is so calm and passionless.

Desire to escape her fate has left her.

Once more, before she leaves this home, she kneels to

pray, but she has not been upon her knees five minutes before Molly, the servant, comes into the room and exclaims, excitedly :

"I can't stay at home alone, miss—and I won't! Robbers will come and take me away if I do! They've broke into Hindfleet Hall, and murdered Mr. Gilbert Tavenner, and "——

"Stop!" cries Hetty, her face suddenly becoming as white as the gown she wears ; "what happened at Hindfleet Hall? Tell me quickly!"

"Well, 'twas night before last, miss. The night you come home," begins the girl. But Hetty holds up her hand, and she continues : "Burglars broke into the hall ; they didn't steal nothing, cause they were caught ; but one as got away shot Mr. Gilbert Tavenner, and if he isn't dead, he's dying ; there ain't no hope for him, no how!"

Then she utters a wild cry of alarm, which brings Mrs. Hamblin to the rescue, for Hetty has sunk upon the ground, white and senseless, her bridal wreath looking as though it would crown her for her grave.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MEANWHILE, Colnehurst parish church is alive with excitement.

Every available foot of standing room has been appropriated by the interested townspeople, who are always to the front when any little bit of excitement is on foot.

The story of Lord Claude Irongate's love for his trainer's daughter has been circulated far and wide, and now the church and all its approaches are crowded by people who are anxious to catch even the faintest glimpse of the beautiful bride.

There is much subdued whispering while the assembled

multitude is waiting for the arrival of the bride and bridegroom.

Many of Lord Claude's friends are here who, later on, will come to the reception at the castle, notably Lord Ingledene, who has come by special invitation from Mrs. Beevor.

That good lady has been anxious to make the reception a success, to prevent her nephew from feeling that most of his friends have deserted him at this juncture; and having occasion to write to Lord Ingledene yesterday, she had mentioned Hetty's abduction at the instigation of Lady Daphne, and had expressed a hope that his lordship would come to the wedding.

So here he is, brought to the church partly by friendliness, partly by curiosity, little dreaming that he will himself have an important part to play in the drama that is now being enacted.

The marriage is timed to take place at two o'clock, and before that hour Mrs. Beevor arrives, accompanied by a friend, and meeting Lord Ingledene near the altar she shakes hands with him cordially; then she glances round the crowded church, and smiles at the sea of faces turned toward her.

Presently Lord Claude arrives, and now a thrill of excitement runs through that great assembly, for they feel sure that the bride cannot be far behind.

The clock strikes two; the clergyman, the bridegroom, all the invited guest are assembled; but where is the bride?

Is she showing her power over the man about to marry her, by keeping him and his friends awaiting her good pleasure? Who can tell?

Slowly pass the minutes when we wait and watch for them to depart, and the church clock chimes out the first quarter when people think that twice that length of time has gone by.

Lord Claude looks more handsome than usual to-day.

There is a sense of triumph about him, and many are the bright eyes that look upon him kindly, while the fair owners envy Hetty her good fortune.

His face changes slightly when he meets Lord Ingledene. It would seem as though his presence brought to his mind some unpleasant memory, but, if it is so, he chases it away quickly, shakes his lordship by the hand, and looks about him curiously. But in such a sea of faces who can distinguish individuals? Certainly not Lord Claude, and he is really too much excited to look closely at any of them.

He has this morning heard of Gilbert Tavenner's danger, and it would really not be true to say that he is grieved at the calamity which has befallen his rival. For that Gilbert is his rival he has all along felt rather than known.

The minutes go slowly by. The second quarter strikes and still no bride appears, and there is a restless stir among the congregation and much whispering as to the cause of this unpardonable delay.

"If she doesn't come soon you can't be married to-day," remarks Lord Ingledene, grimly, addressing the bridegroom.

And the latter frowns as he replies:

"I cannot understand it. Her mother would surely have sent if anything had happened."

Even as he speaks a messenger arrives from Stanmoor with a letter, which Lord Claude tears open, nervously.

It is a hurried note, written by Mrs. Hamblin, and is to the effect:

"Hetty has been taken ill, but is better, and we are on our way. I hope we will be in time."

"Ah, I thought it was wonderful, she was so well yesterday," mutters his lordship, gloomily.

Then he looks at his watch, asks some questions of the messenger and goes to the church door to await the arrival of the bride.

The carriage from Stanmoor, with its pair of white horses, drives up to the church door at last, just as the clock is about to chime a quarter to three.

"We have no time to lose," says Lord Claude, coming forward eagerly, and helping the bride and her mother to alight.

Then he perceives that Hetty's face is whiter than the gown she wears, and that her wonderful eyes have a strained look in them, as though she had gazed upon some horrible sight which she cannot yet forget.

But the ladies are alone in the carriage, and his lordship asks, sharply, in an undertone, of Mrs. Hamblin:

"Where is your husband? He was to have given her away."

"Drunk — dead drunk!" is the low-toned and contemptuous reply.

"Well, there is no time to be lost," cries his lordship, promptly. "Ingledene must take his place."

He is so hurried, so peremptory, that he does not observe the sudden pallor that comes over Mrs. Hamblin's face, nor the stare of inquiry, rather than of recognition, with which Lord Ingledene regards the faded, though still handsome, woman whom he knows to be the trainer's wife.

But despite his amazement, Lord Ingledene does not hesitate; he takes the pale but beautiful bride upon his arm, and with her walks calmly up the aisle to the altar rails.

Every eye is turned upon them.

He looks young to stand in the place of a father, and she looks too statue-like to be a happy bride.

There is no unnecessary delay now; the service is commenced, the clergyman's voice comes clear and distinct to every corner of the building as he says:

"Therefore, if any man can show just cause why they may not be lawfully joined together, let him now speak, or else forever hold his peace."

There is a slight pause here, broken by the voice of a man exclaiming :

"I can show just cause ; this woman is his wife ! "

And the speaker comes forward from a secluded pew, in which he had been sitting, leading a short, dark-faced woman by the hand.

The words act like a spell upon Hetty — they transform her from a moving statue into a living woman, in whose breast hope suddenly springs into life ; and she turns with strange gladness to look at the intruders.

"It is a lie ! " cries Lord Claude, his face flushed with passion ; "I don't know this woman — I have never seen her before. Where is the proof that she is my wife ? "

"Come to the vestry," says the rector, hastily closing his prayer-book.

But Lord Claude protests :

"This woman is mad, she is nothing to me. Continue the service, if you please."

"It is too late to-day," replies the rector, solemnly.

And even as he speaks the four-quarters are chimed out, and the church clock strikes three.

"Eugenie ! " says Hetty, turning, with a faint smile, to the woman who has claimed to be Lord Claude's wife.

But the Mexican draws back, with hate glowing in her black, wild-looking eyes, as she hisses :

"You have robbed me of all that made my life bright and happy. May a broken-hearted woman's curse follow you ! "

"How horrible ! " cries the intended bride, shrinking back, and glancing with a mute appeal for justice to Leon de Mæstro, who says hurriedly to the excited woman upon his arm :

"Hush — hush ! it is not her fault ! "

But it is Lord Ingledene who takes Hetty upon his arm, as though he had a right to protect her, and leads her into the vestry, the rest of the wedding party following them,

and Leon de Mæstro, with his unhappy sister on his arm, bringing up the rear.

Mrs. Hamblin is mute. Lord Ingledene's presence overawes her, and she feels with intense self-reproach that, whatever humiliation may come to Hetty from this interrupted marriage, the blame is all with herself, for having forced her unwilling child into such a cruel position.

For the satisfaction of the clergyman, Leon de Mæstro's case is soon stated and his sister's marriage certificate is produced.

"But this certifies to the marriage of one Laurence Trevor," remarks the rector, severely.

"And that is the man who called himself Laurence Trevor," asserts Eugenie, passionately, "That is the man who was my husband."

She points with anger at Lord Claude, but he replies, contemptuously:

"You mistake some other person for me; I should never have been so foolish as to marry you."

"I saw the death of one Laurence Trevor in the *Times* of the 20th of December last," here interposes Lord Ingledene. "I remember cutting out the slip. Here it is."

But Eugenie cries, wildly:

"We have seen it, and we know it is false! There stands my perjured husband, and you know it! You saw us together at the theater; you spoke to me in the street the next day, when I lost my purse. I did not know your name, but I know your face; I never forget a face when once I see it."

"It is useless to continue this painful scene," observes the rector, addressing Lord Claude, in a tone expressive of sympathy for his unpleasant position. "It is too late for the marriage to be celebrated to-day, otherwise I am bound to say that, in the absence of more definite proof of this lady's claim to be your wife, I should not hesitate to finish the service I began."

"To-morrow then," says his lordship, pale with passion, and carrying everything before him with a high hand. "It's a pity you did not come earlier," he adds, addressing Mrs. Hamblin, sharply.

"Hetty was ill, she fainted; I was afraid we should not get here at all," is the timid reply.

For Mrs. Hamblin is agitated by more causes than one, and she cannot explain here that, besides reviving her daughter from her swoon, she had spent a good half hour in vainly trying to rouse her husband, and make him sufficiently sober to enable him to give his daughter away.

"Very well, we will be earlier to-morrow," says Lord Claude, with an assumption of gayety, and he offers the bride his arm, which she takes reluctantly.

Unconciously she had clung to Lord Ingledene; but he hands her over, as a matter of course, to the man who, but for this delay, would have been her bridegroom; and he at once offers the arm that has been just freed to her mother.

"I warn you that we have ample proof that Lord Claude Irongate and Laurence Trevor are one and the same person," says Leon de Mæstro, with dignity; "and I will take good care that he does my sister justice."

Then the party pass by him, walking out of the church as though the marriage had actually taken place.

Mrs. Hamblin is on Lord Ingledene's arm; she wears a rich dress of velvet, that is not ruby, nor crimson, nor claret, but that is warm and bright, and even youthful looking, and she carries herself in her noble company like one to the manner born.

"I suppose we are going to Colneford Castle," says his lordship, as they follow the presumptive bride and bridegroom to the church door.

"Probably," she replies; "but my daughter must not go without me. Please arrange it, my lord."

She turns her eyes upon his, and he answers, promptly: "I will."

But it is not an easy matter to arrange.

Lord Claude is angry and masterful; and if Hetty did not turn and cling to her mother, he would carry her off, as though she were indeed his bride.

In this he is thwarted, however; Lord Ingledene gets into the carriage with Hetty and her mother, and Lord Claude has to return to the castle as he came, alone.

They have proceeded about half of the distance they have to travel when Lord Ingledene, looking fixedly at Mrs. Hamblin, asks, suddenly:

"Are you not my sister Harriet?"

The question takes her so much by surprise that she answers in the affirmative without hesitation.

"I felt sure of it the moment I saw you," returns his lordship. "But where is your husband?"

"At home—dead drunk!" she replies, with unutterable scorn.

And he, touched by her mute misery, ejaculates:

"Poor girl! what you must have suffered!"

"Ah, yes!" she responds, with a deep sigh. "Better I had died and been buried than have made such an unutterably insane marriage."

"It has been bad for us all," he assents, sadly. "But you have a brother in me, and my doors are open to you and your daughter, come to me when you will."

"You were always kind of heart, George," says the saddened woman, "and your goodness is more than I deserve."

"Happy for us we don't all get our deserts," Lord Ingledene says to Mrs. Hamblin, with an uneasy laugh. "And listen," he continues, "this marriage must not take place to-morrow—this matter must be cleared up first. I am not at all sure that the dark woman isn't really Lord Claude's wife. Will she fret very much if it never takes place?"

He glances at Hetty, who is leaning back in her corner,

her eyes closed, her cheeks white, and an expression of passionate suffering upon her lovely countenance.

"Fret!" repeats the mother, disdainfully. "She hates him!"

"In that case she shall not marry him!" is the emphatic exclamation. "But here we are. For a time we must keep up appearances."

And as he speaks the carriage pulls up at the entrance of Colnehurst Castle, where Lord Claude stands waiting to receive them.

But who is this coming up the avenue, running, her face white, her hair floating wildly behind her?

Mrs. Hamblin catches sight of the girl, recognizes her, with a sudden tightening of the breath, pauses, and asks:

"Well!"

"The master's dead, ma'am!" gasps poor Molly. "He took a bottle of brandy when you left the house, and said he'd drink Miss Hetty's health; and then he fell down in a fit, and I couldn't rouse him, and I called in the men, but they said he was gone."

"He could not have gone at a better time," mutters Lord Ingledene, under his breath; but, aloud, he says:

"Go to the servants' hall, my good girl, till you are wanted."

Then he gives his sister his arm, while Hetty is carried, rather than led, into the mansion.

This has been a tragic day for her, poor girl! But the tragedies are not yet over, for those who sow the storm will surely reap the whirlwind.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE news of her father's death seems to Hetty's stunned sensibilities like a crushing blow that takes from her the power of greater suffering, so that her mother and Mrs.

Beevor are frightened by the stony calmness that comes over the girl who should now have been a bride.

But when her mother bursts into tears, reproaching herself with having wished for her husband's death, the floodgates of the girl's heart are unlocked, and they weep together, wildly and passionately, with a violence of grief on one side and of self-condemnation on the other that must from its extreme character be only temporary.

Meanwhile, Lord Ingledene and Lord Claude Irongate are having a conversation which is not altogether pleasant.

"Could anything have been more unfortunate than this man's death at this moment?" cries Lord Claude, passionately. "I had determined to marry his daughter to-morrow, in defiance of everybody and everything, at all hazards; and now he dies in this disgraceful fashion, and the women are sure to say that it won't be decent for a girl to get married while her father is lying dead and uncoffined."

"In that they will undoubtedly be in the right," responds Lord Ingledene, coldly.

And Lord Claude observes that the tone of his former boon companion has changed; that he utters his opinion like one having authority, like one having a right to be heard; as though indeed, by accepting the office of giving the bride away, he had become her legal protector.

"It's all very well for you to take their part," exclaims Lord Claude, irritably; "you don't seem to consider the unpleasant situation it leaves me in. If I don't marry Hetty to-morrow, as I declared I would do, it will be in the mouth of everybody that there was truth in that woman's story, told to-day in the church."

"And is there no truth in it?" asks Lord Ingledene, so calmly, so deliberately, that Lord Claude's face changes.

The heat of his anger gives place to a cold pallor, even his lips become white; and though he tries to assume a bold front, his eye is unsteady and shifty as he retorts:

"I don't understand your insinuation ; explain yourself ! "

"The explanation is simple," returns Lord Ingledene, calmly. "I met you at a theater more than twelve months ago, with a dark-eyed lady whose face could not easily be forgotten. You did not introduce us, but the next day I recognized her in Regent street, standing before a milliner's shop, and I saw a woman pick her pocket and make off with her purse down one of the side streets. Naturally I addressed the lady, we got into conversation, she spoke of you as her husband, not once, but half a dozen times, and she was evidently so sincere in supposing me to be her husband's friend that I saw her into a cab and sent her home. I ascertained at the same time that her husband's name was Laurence Trevor, and that the happy couple lived at the Swan's Nest, Hammersmith. That was why I cut out the announcement of the death of Laurence Trevor at sea on December, the 20th."

"You were fooled, as usual, with a pair of bright eyes," sneers Lord Claude, slightingly. "I should never have been idiot enough to marry a woman like that."

"I am not going to contest that point," replies Lord Ingledene, quietly, but the matter must be thoroughly cleared up before you think of marrying my niece."

"Your niece ! " ejaculates Lord Claude, incredulously. "What do you mean ? How can Hetty Hamblin be anything to you ? "

"Do you mean to tell me that you do not know that Mrs. Hamblin is my sister ? " asks the peer, sternly.

"Of course I do not know it," is the evidently sincere reply. "How should I ? Neither Hamblin nor his wife ever mentioned your name to me, and Hetty, I am convinced, did not know anything about you."

"Then why did you request me to give her away to-day, when her father failed to appear at church ? " demanded Lord Ingledene, sternly.

"Because you happened to be at hand and we had no

time to lose," is the truthful reply. "You were my oldest friend present, and I naturally turned to you."

"Still, the moment I saw the girl's mother I thought you knew all about her," says Lord Ingledene, uneasily.

"No, I know nothing of the mother's history," asserts Lord Claude, gloomily. "I saw that she was greatly superior to her husband, of course, though she never volunteered any information about herself. But how did it all come about? Did you know that your sister was living at Stanmoor?"

"No, I didn't know what had become of her," replies Lord Ingledene, gravely. "She was older than I, you know," he continues, "and I was at college when she ran away from home with her groom. She had been engaged to Lord Edward Tavenner some years previously, but it was broken off mysteriously, and he married the lady who now bears his name. I have heard that my sister was never the same after that; she used to ride and drive a great deal, and she had a favorite groom, with whom she one day eloped. When my father heard that she had married this fellow he read the funeral service as though she had been dead, and forbade her name ever again to be mentioned in his presence. What became of my sister I did not know; I never sought her, and she did not seek me. I had even forgotten the name of her husband. But when I met her at the church door to-day I recognized her immediately, though she has changed greatly since we last parted."

"Well, and what do you propose to do?" asks Lord Claude, gloomily.

He begins dimly to realize that a strong protector has sprung up for Hetty Hamblin, a kinsman whose claim to succor her cannot be disputed.

"I propose to take my sister and niece to my own house to-day if possible," is the emphatic reply. "What future arrangements are made must depend on them. It is useless for you and me to discuss what a strong-headed woman like

my sister and a lovely girl like my niece may decide upon. They will tell you that themselves in good time, I do not doubt."

"Fate is against me!" groans Lord Claude, bitterly. "If Hamblin had not died to-day, I would have married the girl to-morrow, spite of all of you."

"Yes, if he had not died I should have had no right to interfere," responds Lord Ingledene, quietly; "but since he is dead, my sister and her daughter will naturally look to me for protection."

Lord Claude shrugs his shoulders and turns toward the nearest window, through which he can see the snow-clad landscape.

Gall and bitterness are in his heart. In the moment of triumph the cup had been dashed from his lips, and now the conviction slowly creeps into his soul that Hetty Hamblin will never again stand by his side at the altar, a passive though unwilling bride.

No, if her father had lived, if her mother's kinsman had not so unexpectedly come forward, he might still have carried everything with a high hand, and have made Hetty meet him at the church again to-morrow, and this time marry him.

But Joe Hamblin's sudden death makes this impossible, and he does not doubt that Hetty's unwillingness to become his wife will carry great weight with her uncle, although hitherto it has had but little influence upon her mother.

As for Eugenie and Leon de Mæstro, he is prepared to defy them.

That he did marry Eugenie under a false name is but too true, but he believes that the identity of Laurence Trevor with himself can never be proved.

With infinite care he had laid his plans. He had amply provided for Eugenie before he deserted her, and after that unfortunate meeting at Walberswick, when she recognized him, he had, as we know, postponed his marriage with

Hetty, made his appearance again at the Swan's Nest, having previously ascertained that Eugenie was still absent; and, leaving a letter for her expressing his regret at not finding her at home, had stated that he was going to America and would write to her shortly.

And he did take a short sea trip, losing the name of Laurence Trevor on the way and returning to Colnehurst as Lord Claude Irongate.

So perfect does he believe this deceptive chain of evidence to be that even Eugenie's appearance in church to-day has not daunted him; and now, as he sees a carriage drive up the avenue and Leon de Mæstro alight from it, accompanied by another dark-eyed foreigner, his temper rises, he rings a bell furiously, and orders the servant who obeys his summons to tell the two strangers that he will not see them.

But De Mæstro and Di Castro will not be denied; there is an unseemly altercation in the hall, and the foreigners are forcibly ejected by the servants, while Lord Claude stands coolly by, a supercilious smile curling his beautiful but cruel lips.

"You shall pay dearly for this outrage!" cries De Mæstro, shaking his clenched hand at the heartless master of the proud mansion.

Words that are remembered against him with fatal accuracy!

When the first outburst of grief is over Hetty becomes more calm and collected, but she is still too agitated to realize the marvelous change of fortune that has suddenly befallen her mother and herself.

Indeed, it is not until she has changed her wedding garments for those of mourning—has bade adieu to Lord Claude and Mrs. Beevor, and finds herself once more in a carriage with her mother and Lord Ingledene, that the fact dawns slowly upon her mind that neither Stanmoor nor Colnehurst Castle will henceforth be her home.

It is needless to dwell upon Mrs. Hamblin's silent but deep-felt emotion at once more finding herself under the roof that had sheltered her infancy and girlhood.

Madly had she forfeited the right to live here, and only after passing through great tribulation has she been permitted to come back to the home of her ancestors, a broken-hearted and broken-spirited woman.

But we must not leave Colnehurst Castle just yet, though our heroine has so speedily done so.

Lord Claude is like a man deranged when he watches the carriage drive away in which sits the girl whom, only a few hours ago, he believed would be his bride.

His aunt avoids him, his servants shrink out of his way; the house is intolerable to him, and a sudden desire comes over him to look upon Joe Hamblin's moveless face, to assure himself past all doubt that the man who would now be most valuable to him is dead.

So he sets off in the dim twilight to walk to Stanmoor, feeling, perhaps, that the exertion necessary for the walk will do him good.

But he never reaches Stanmoor; neither does he return to Colnehurst Castle.

His movements at all times are so secret and so uncertain that his aunt and servants do not trouble themselves at his absence; and late at night snow falls again, one of the heaviest falls of the season, and no single person troubles himself to seek for the missing nobleman.

It is not, indeed, until a thaw sets in that a terrible discovery is made in the lane leading from the high-road to Stanmoor.

The body of a man rolled into a ditch, that has been buried under the snow, is found; and, when it is identified as that of Lord Claude Irongate, it is likewise discovered that he has been foully murdered.

Of course there is a hue and cry all over the country; it is not every day that the son of a peer is murdered on his

own estate, and suspicion of having committed the deed at once falls upon Leon de Mæstro, whose threats are so well remembered.

The first to denounce her brother as a murderer is Eugenie.

She has been in a wild, unsettled condition of mind ever since she saw her husband standing at the altar, eager to make another girl his wife.

All her brother's efforts have failed to induce her to leave Colneford. She is determined to see Lord Claude again, to see him alone, and when she hears of his awful death she makes her way to the castle, where his body lies, demands to pray by the side of her husband; and the scared servants lead the way to the darkened chamber, where all that is mortal remains of him who in life had turned from her with hate and loathing.

And they leave them together, the living and the dead; but when they return an hour later the living is no more, in death at least they are united.

Thus Eugenie's life's tragedy ends, but her unfortunate brother lies in prison, charged with the murder of the man against whom he had such good cause to vow vengeance.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Let us turn to a brighter picture.

It is two months later than the events recorded in the last chapter.

The snow has departed, the landscape has upon it that fresh, bright tint of green peculiar to early spring, the trees are beginning to shoot forth their tender buds, and the song of the lark is heard as he soars higher still and higher in the deep blue sky, pouring from its throat a flood of melody.

And Hetty Hamblin, living in her uncle's house, seeing around her portraits of her ancestors; coming home, as it

were, to the position in the world for which Nature intended her, soon begins to regard her past life as being but little more substantial than a dream.

Not all a dream, however; the memory of poor Chris, who was always kind to her, and of her father, who, with all his faults, loved her dearly, still lingers with her tenderly. And there are other thoughts that nestle in her heart, and find as yet no expression in words.

Gilbert Tavenner did not die from his wound, as Molly reported on the morning that was to have seen Hetty a bride, but he was very ill, dangerously ill, and for awhile his life was despaired of.

His previous illness had weakened him, and it was ever upon his mind that Hetty was being kept away from him, so that even in his delirium he called her name again and again, refusing to be comforted.

Indeed, when the fever at length leaves him, he is so low and so spiritless that the doctor is in despair, and it is his college friend, Cyrus Grandville, who determines to try his skill in rousing the man to a desire to live.

At first, as though he were merely telling the invalid a piece of local gossip, he describes Lord Claude Irongate's interrupted wedding, and the astounding discovery made immediately afterward that Mrs. Hamblin, the dead trainer's wife, was the sister of Lord Ingledene.

But before he gets thus far Gilbert's interest is aroused.

He asks questions feverishly, eagerly, and gradually he learns all that his friend can tell him — Joe Hamblin's death, Lord Claude's tragic end, and the fact that Hetty and her mother are now living at Ingledene Hall.

"Then the promise I made my mother when I came of age, that without her consent I would never marry a girl of humble rank, does not apply to Hetty," cries Gilbert, anxiously; "the niece of Lord Ingledene is my social equal. But does she love me? Is it possible, do you think, Grand-

ville, for a girl to love one man and yet go to the altar to marry another ?"

"I dare say it is," replies the young clergyman, sadly. "You don't know what pressure might have been brought to bear upon her ; and it looked like love, her coming here on foot, through that dreadful snow, to warn your mother of the attack upon the house that was afterward made."

"But it was not Hetty — surely it was not Hetty who came to give the warning !" cries Gilbert, excitedly.

"It was, your mother told me so at the time," replies Cyrus Grandville, gravely. "I expostulated with her for allowing the poor girl to go home alone, on foot, in such a snowstorm ; but she said, truly enough no doubt, that the girl was gone before she could detain her."

"Ah ! what you have told me accounts for my mother's strange behavior of late," sighs Gilbert, faintly. "I have been able to learn nothing from her about Hetty except that she is well and unmarried."

"Yes, that is all you need know at present," responds Grandville, smiling ; "and now you have to make haste and get well and go a-wooing before any other rival steps in to win the prize."

Gilbert smiles. He thinks that his difficulties have all disappeared ; that he has only to get back his health and strength to seek Hetty and win her.

But the task before him is not so easy as he at first supposes.

His mother feels herself to be in the wrong, and the breach that had been made between Hetty's mother and herself has never been healed, and is never likely to be.

To sue for pardon and confess herself to be wrong is a thing which the mother of the future Duke of Sandhaven will never bring herself to do; and, when Gilbert is stronger and suggests that she shall go with him to Ingledene Hall, to call upon Mrs. Hamblin and her daughter, she emphatically refuses to do anything of the kind.

"Very well, then I shall go alone," says the young man, resolutely.

"And be snubbed for your pains," retorts Lady Edward, angrily.

"Perhaps so," he replies, quietly, "but if Hetty does not snub me I shall not care for the rest."

A remark which his mother receives with unconcealed impatience.

Personally she has no objection to Hetty; on the contrary she likes her; but to go and sue for the hand of the daughter of the woman she once wronged is far more than her pride will ever allow her to do.

But love laughs at difficulties as he laughs at locksmiths, and as soon as Gilbert Tavenner is strong enough to bear the fatigues of a long drive he determines to go to Ingledene Hall, ask to see Hetty, plead his suit and formally propose for her hand.

Meanwhile Hetty is happy in her new home and under her vastly improved circumstances, but her happiness is not perfect.

Her uncle is kindness itself, and she soon learns to love him. The old hall is the most perfect place she ever saw or dreamed of — so old-fashioned, so big and rambling; and many of the servants have grown gray in the service of the Ingledenes.

From the housekeeper, who was once her mother's nurse, Hetty hears what Mrs. Hamblin would never tell her daughter — namely, how she came to know and marry a man so far below her in station as handsome Joe Hamblin.

She hears, too, of her stern, old grandfather, who loved his daughter so well that her folly broke his heart, and the imaginative girl reads and dreams at such times as she is not engage with the masters whom her uncle has engaged to superintend her painting and music, and the study of foreign languages, in which he wishes her to be proficient.

So her time is well and profitably filled, and yet she has ample leisure for thought.

She has heard from her uncle that Gilbert Tavenner is slowly regaining health and strength, and she wonders, timidly, if he and she will ever meet again.

Very tenderly and lovingly she thinks of him, but for all this there is a little resentment in her gentle heart at his unbroken silence.

"If he loved me," she argues, "he would surely have made some effort to save me from becoming Lord Claude's wife," and she remembers sadly that her interrupted marriage was due to no act or endeavor upon his part to save her for himself.

She is thus thinking this morning as she is stitching some fine embroidery, while her mother is reading aloud, when her uncle taps lightly at the door, and, being bidden to do so, walks in.

For this is the ladies' morning-room, and here he never, unannounced, intrudes upon their privacy.

"Harriet," he says, addressing his sister, "my lawyer is in the study, taking instructions for a deed, and he wants to look at your marriage certificate — have you it here?"

"Yes; in that writing-case," is the reply.

And, as his lordship hands it over to her, Mrs. Hamblin selects a key from the bunch she carries in her pocket, and carelessly unlocks the desk.

If the world had not changed with her so wonderfully of late, she might remember why she last went to the secret drawer in this desk, and, remembering what she had hidden there, would hesitate to open the recess in the presence of her daughter. But the circumstance has, for the time, passed out of her mind; Hetty's admirers are things of the past, they do not trouble her at present, and, passing her hand under some loose papers, she touches a spring, and a drawer flies open — opens with such a jerk that, being over-

full, the paper that lay on the top literally jumps out onto Hetty's lap.

For the girl to take it in her hand and look at it is but natural; and a cry of surprise issues from her lips, for this is a letter — a sealed letter — bearing many foreign post-marks, and addressed to herself.

"Mother, when did this come? Why have I not had it?" she asks, with unconscious indignation.

"It came not long before we left Stanmoor. I thought it would upset you and I put it here for safety — it is not opened you see — and afterward I really forgot it."

"I see. Were there any more besides this that were kept from me?" asks Hetty, keeping down her anger with a strong hand.

"No, that was the only one," is the emphatic reply.

And, as the girl takes her newly-found treasure to her own room to read it alone, Mrs. Hamblin turns to her brother, and says, plaintively:

"She will never forgive me! She always trusted me so fully; and she will doubt me now! I wish I had destroyed the letter; it would have made no difference to anybody."

"I don't agree with you there," responds Lord Ingledene, with a smile. I never saw Hetty look more beautiful than when she clasped that letter to her bosom. It is from young Tavenner, I suppose."

"Yes, I believe so," is the cold and laconic reply.

"A capital young fellow," continues his lordship, genially; "clever and well spoken of by those who know him, and a splendid match for any woman who can win him. The old duke is on his last legs."

"He is well enough in himself," replies Mrs. Hamblin in a slighting tone, "but I can never forget the wrong his mother did me."

"Don't you think it would be well to let by-gones be by-gones, and to take people as we find them?" asks Lord Ingledene, significantly.

And his sister wisely takes the hint, and mutters, audibly: "Perhaps you are right."

Hetty, in the privacy of her own chamber, reads her love-letter with beating heart and eager eyes.

It is her first love-letter. It breathes words of passionate devotion, and it contains an earnest prayer that she will wait for the writer; that she will not allow herself to be given to another, but will have faith in him until he can surmount all obstacles and claim her for his own.

How she reads this letter over and over again, and presses it to her lips, and hides it in her bosom when she has to descend to luncheon, it were vain to tell.

The loving words it contains still fill her thoughts to the exclusion of any other subject, and she smiles to herself softly and sweetly, thinking of Gilbert, and assuring herself that he cannot now be much longer in coming.

Her mother is still laboring under the unpleasant consciousness of having done something which she would rather have left undone; and, not being in a mood to converse with her daughter upon the subject which evidently fills the girl's mind, she, directly luncheon is over, goes to visit an old lady who was a friend of her mother, and who is now an invalid, though she was one of the first, on Mrs. Hamblin's return home, to send loving messages to her.

Hetty rarely accompanies her mother when she goes to see Mrs. Nethercliff, and this afternoon she does not volunteer to do so.

Lord Ingledene is still busy with his lawyer, and Hetty wanders into a conservatory leading out of the south drawing-room, which runs along the length of one side of the old mansion.

This conservatory is a favorite spot with our heroine; it is warm and bright on the very coldest and gloomiest day.

Here, standing about as though they were human beings who objected to be sorted, are rare plants and palms; there is a fountain, there are divans and chairs and lounges, and

there are small tables, upon which stand illustrated and comic papers, a few of the latest magazines, and a volume or two of poetry.

But Hetty is restless this afternoon, she cannot settle herself to any occupation, and she is standing by a huge globe of gold-fish, watching its glittering occupants, when the sound of voices reaches her, and the next instant her uncle appears, and exclaims :

"Ah, here she is!"

A second or two later Gilbert Tavenner is standing before her, clasping her hand in his own ; while she can scarcely see him, for her eyes swim, and she feels, for the moment, as though she must fall.

It is the voice of her uncle that rouses her as he says:

"You will have to entertain Mr. Tavenner for a little while, Hetty, for I am busy, as you know ; but try and persuade him to stay to dinner, if you can."

Then Lord Ingledene considerately leaves them, and the lovers are only conscious that they are alone.

For a few seconds there is silence between them.

Words seem hard to speak when the heart is full, and it is Hetty who at length asks, timidly, as she withdraws her hand from his warm clasp:

"Are you better ? You have been ill, have you not ?"

"Yes, very ill," he replies, tenderly ; "and but for you, I might not now be alive."

"I ?" she asks. "What did I do to save you ?"

"You warned my mother, did you not, of the intention of the thieves to break into our house ?"

"Yes ; and I have sometimes thought I had better not have done so," she replies, with a smile ; "for then, though they might have taken your property, they might not have endangered your life."

"And they might have killed us all as we slept," he retorts, "and in that case I should not have been here to thank you. It is the first time I have been able to get so

far," he adds, a sudden pallor overspreading his handsome face.

"Oh, do sit down!" cries Hetty, leading him to a divan. "Can I get you anything?" she asks, with solicitude; "a glass of wine, or anything?"

"No, nothing; but sit by me," he says, in a low tone, and he holds her hand in his own, while he recovers from the faintness that was coming over him. Presently he asks:

"Hetty, why didn't you answer my letter or take any notice of it?"

"I only knew a couple of hours ago that you had written it," she replies. "I thought you had quite forgotten me."

"Forgotten you!" he repeats, passionately. "I shall only forget you when I ceased to remember everything. Do you recollect our conversation when last we parted?" he asks, tenderly. "Your mother interrupted us," he continues, "but I told you then, as I told you in my letter, as I tell you now again, I love you — I want you to be my wife."

Hetty blushes sweetly and makes no reply. But she does not repulse the arm that embraces her, does not shrink back with abhorrence from the lips that so passionately kiss her own, and after a little while she is won to confess that she does love him, and after much persuasion is induced to return one of the many kisses he so freely gives.

Hetty and Gilbert Tavenner have so much to say to each other regarding the past, the present and the future, and they are in so little hurry to exhaust the subject of their mutual love, and of all they have suffered in consequence, that they seem to have spent but a very short time together when Lord Ingledene returns to them.

His lordship has been discreet enough to speak in a loud tone to a servant before turning into the conservatory, so as to give the lovers timely warning of his approach; but a glance at Hetty's blushing, happy face tells him all that he wishes to know, and he says, carelessly:

"I can show just cause: — This woman is his wife!" exclaimed a man, leading a dark-faced woman by the hand.

"Your mother wants you, Hetty. I hope you have persuaded Mr. Tavenner to stay to dinner?"

"I quite forgot," replies the girl, covered with confusion; "he turned faint, and"——

"Turned faint?" repeats his lordship. "Then we must keep him till to-morrow. What do you say, my dear fellow?"

For Hetty has gone.

"You are very good," replies Gilbert; "and you probably know why I came here. Hetty has promised to be my wife, but I am afraid her mother does not regard me with favor."

"If you and Hetty have settled the matter between you, I will manage her mother," replies Lord Ingledene, gaily! "and now you had better make up your mind to stay here a few days; the change will do you good."

"I am sure it will," is the reply, "and I should like it above all things."

So a telegram is sent to Hindfleet Hall, and that same night Gilbert Tavenner's valet arrives with such of his master's wardrobe as he requires.

Space forbids us to linger over Hetty's happiness; suffice it to say that, before Gilbert's visit at Ingledene Hall is over, Mrs. Hamblin and Lady Edward Tavenner are both convinced of the uselessness of opposing the wishes of their children, and both tacitly agree to bridge over their past differences, and consent to the proposed marriage at an early date.

But there is the consent of one other person to be asked, if only as a compliment, and this is Gilbert's grandfather, the Duke of Sandhaven. His grace has been failing fast of late; but, for all that, it is a distinct shock to Gilbert, a couple of hours after his return home, to be informed of his grandfather's sudden death.

"And you mean to make Hetty Hamblin, that drunken trainer's daughter, Duchess of Sandhaven?" asks Lady

Edward Tavenner, disdainfully, when she has read the telegram aloud.

"Yes; no rank is too high for her, no position so lofty that she will not grace it!" replies her son, with all a lover's enthusiasm. And his mother turns away in silence.

It is her last protest against a marriage which she cannot prevent, and, perhaps, would not if she could.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

It is while Gilbert Tavenner, now Duke of Sandhaven, is at Black Tor Castle, attending the funeral of his grandfather, that a small tenant on the estate comes to Ingledene Hall and asks to see his lordship.

"If you please, my lord," says the man, who does not possess an irreproachable character among the gamekeepers, "there's a chap in my house as is dying; he seems to have something on his mind, he does, but he won't tell it to nobody but Miss Hetty, your lordship's niece. He was in the service, or worked with Miss Hetty's father, and he seems to know all about her."

"What is his name?" asks Lord Ingledene, curiously.

"Blake, my lord, Jem Blake; he says he can't die in peace till he's seen Miss Hetty."

"Wait here while I speak with my niece," says his lordship, kindly.

But when, some ten minutes later, Lord Ingledene returns to the study, his face looks stern, and he says, gravely:

"My niece cannot go to this man; he has twice attempted her life, and, though she forgives him, you may tell him that she does not wish to see him again."

"He's dying, my lord; and he have some bad deed to tell of," pleads the man. "He ought to tell it to a magistrate, and so I've told him; but he does nothing but cry for Hetty."

"If he would like to see me, I will come; and I am a magistrate as you know," says his lordship, resolutely; "but I will not allow my niece to speak with him again."

So the messenger departs and returns, and when he leaves the hall again he is accompanied by Lord Ingledene.

Upon a miserable bed, in a wretchedly-furnished room, Jem Blake, the stableman, is lying; his face so thin, his frame so gaunt, that his eyes look unnaturally bright and large; and there is a fierce, hungry light in them, which makes his lordship doubt for a moment if he had been wise in coming.

"You want to see me?" asks Lord Ingledene, advancing to the side of the bed.

"No, I want to see Hetty Hamblin," replies Jem Blake. "But I 'spose she's afraid to come, ain't she?"

"Her mother will not allow her to come," is the cautious reply.

"Ah, just like her! And you are the mother's brother, ain't you? Well, you'll have to do!"

A fit of coughing seizes him here and shakes his poor, shrunken frame as though it would rend it asunder.

When he can speak again, his voice is weaker, and he says, hurriedly:

"I must be quick; I've no time to lose. The doctor said I couldn't live through the night; didn't he, Bill?"

This to the man who fetched his lordship, and who replies, carelessly:

"He did, Jem."

"Then this is what I've got to say, my lord," says Jem, resolutely. "'Twas me that shot Lord Claude Irongate, and not the foreign chap who's lying in prison, and whose sister my lord married."

"You!" exclaims Lord Ingledene, incredulously. "Why should you murder him? What harm had he done you?"

"What harm!" echoes Jem; "harm enough; he'd robbed

me of the girl I wanted, and he'd thrashed me in her presence within an inch of my life! I was bitter against Hetty till she begged me off and said she'd take the blows herself if he struck at me again, and then I swore I'd be revenged on him. I meant to have shot him before he married her, but somehow I couldn't do it, for I thought she'd grieve for him. But when the marriage was stopped by his lawful wife, and I saw Hetty's face, white and full of grief as she was led out of the church, I swore he should never see another sunrise, and I kept my word. I followed him as he walked to Stanmoor that evening, and I shot him and rolled him into a ditch, and the snow covered him. And that's all, my lord. I ain't a bit sorry for what I've done, and I don't much care for the man who will swing for my work if I don't split on myself; but Hetty will think better of me for doing what she'll call an act of justice. Tell her I do it for her sake; tell her"——

But the cruel cough convulses him again, and though, with the aid of restoratives, he revives sufficiently to sign the hurriedly-written confession, the end is so near that before Lord Ingledene leaves the cottage the drama is over, and Jem Blake has gone beyond the reach of human justice.

. . . . . .

One scene more and our tale is told.

We have followed Hetty Hamblin from obscurity and poverty, through peril and much tribulation, to wealth, happiness and an exalted position; but she is the same Hetty that we first knew—gentle, tender and generous in thought as in deed.

Once again she is dressed as a bride. Once again the gleam of white satin, the glitter of diamonds and the emblematic orange-blossoms heighten her beauty, but the character of that beauty has changed.

Instead of a lethargy consequent upon despair, smiles wreath her lips; a bloom, delicate as the tint of a wild rose,

is on her cheeks ; her glorious eyes are alight with love and hope and faith ; and her mother, who observes the contrast between now and then, turns to her brother, and says, with a sigh :

"Ah ! happiness gives a beauty of its own to every face."

Once more Lord Ingledene leads the bride to the altar ; but it is not the same church, neither is the bridegroom the same.

A wonderful company is there. Some of the noblest in the land have come to grace with their presence the marriage of the young Duke of Sandhaven with Hetty Hamblin, the trainer's daughter.

But it is soon over ; the benediction is uttered, the register is signed, the goodly company follow the bride and bridegroom to Ingledene Hall ; and Gilbert, the moment he is alone with his bride, clasps her in his arms, murmuring, in joyous ecstasy :

"Mine at last, Hetty ! Mine forever !"

THE END.

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